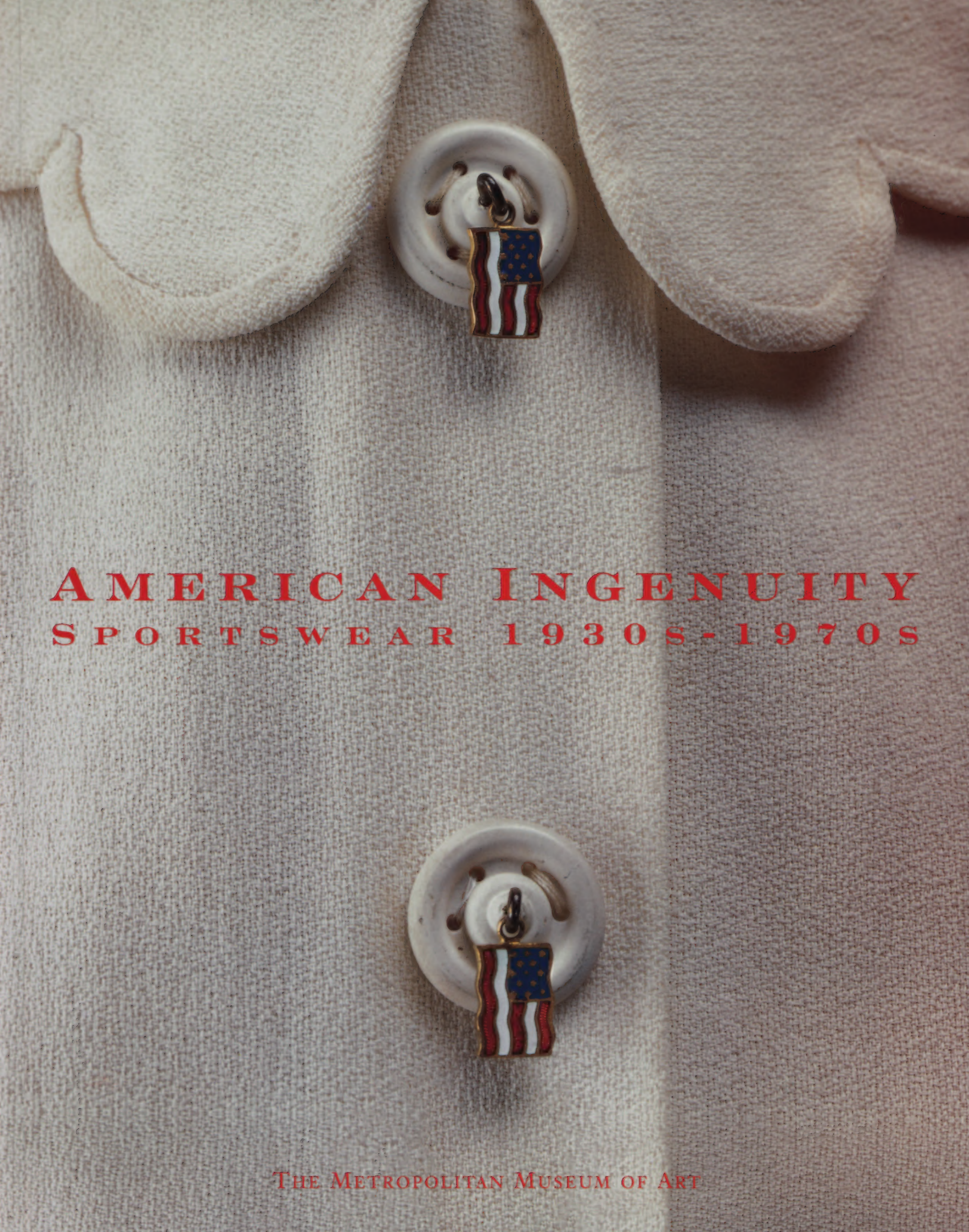

American Ingenuity

Sportswear 1930s-1970s

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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AMERICAN INGENUITY
SPORTSWEAR 1930S-1970S

RICHARD MARTIN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KARIN L. WILLIS

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

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Cover: Detail of American afternoon dress, 1940. See also page 77, top.

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FOREWORD

It is satisfying indeed to see yet another revelation from the collection of The Costume Institute. In the past year, through the eyes and mind of curator Richard Martin, we have seen the poetry of seasons in garments as varied as our 1695 wool mantua, the capacious cotton dresses of the 1860s, and Ralph Lauren's seersucker for 1997. Then, we found words, letters, and numbers inhabiting apparel as a language of their own, sometimes discreet and occasionally obstreperous, in examples as varied as an advertising dress with newsprint from the 1890s or a 1920s dress in lace made from the alphabet. Most recently, we presented an "essay" on the work of Gianni Versace, a designer mostly glamorous, mostly audacious, and always fascinating. Each of these exhibitions has offered a distinctive perception of apparel.

In such context, "American Ingenuity" invites us to a wholly different and challenging approach to apparel by looking at the problem-solving designers, mostly women, who constitute the foundation of American designer sportswear. But here, as earlier, we are not posing the Museum as surrogate for the department store, for this exhibition reveals the critical and specific techniques—tying, wrapping, possessing pockets, adaptive versatility, appropriations of menswear, and such—that have characterized such sportswear.

I note omissions from the standard fashion history. Where are Norman Norell, Mainbocher, and Pauline Trigère, for example? They are great American designers, and they have all been part of recent Costume Institute exhibitions. Norell reminded us in "Swords into Ploughshares" of the crisp, ship-shape military adaptations that made smart dressing the

stylish mode; Mainbocher's landmark 1937 wedding dress for the Duchess of Windsor was shown in "Haute Couture" as a benchmark of discreet dressmaking; Trigère has been in almost every recent Costume Institute exhibition; she was notably represented by her name-declaring black-and-white ensemble in "Wordrobe." These designers are absent here because "American Ingenuity" is not the compass of all American design, rich and varied. It is an examination of the particular penchant for economy and simplicity, invention and democracy, advanced by Richard Martin as a particularly American habit of mind that precipitated a first coterie of independent, but like-minded, women designers, of the 1930s to conceive of apparel as a pragmatic art. We had initially planned to call the exhibition "American Irascibles." For these women designers, as opposed to contemporaries Hattie Carnegie or Charles James, the garment did not hold the allure of painting, sculpture, or even ostensible glamour. Rather, the principle was a more accommodating, calculating one akin to an architecture that is tempered by useful practicalities such as systems of heat and light. For the following forty years and because of these exceptional pioneers, a modest and uncomplicated apparel, almost more appropriately called "clothes" than "fashion," became the core of modern dress attuned to modern lifestyles.

Considering the unparalleled wealth of the collections of The Costume Institute, it might seem odd, at first, that we should be showing a Claire McCardell wrap dress in denim with an attached potholder or an Emily Wilkens cotton striped dress with a big bow. But a collection's wealth and our rich reward in looking at art can come as much from the humble as from the courtly and prized, especially in the modern era. A McCardell dress dismisses the servants and assumes the authority of a modern woman; her art is to give democracy a tour de force of dressmaking techniques and to answer at the same time to apparel needs. Wilkens could be costuming Agnes de Mille's "Rodeo" with a sweet, beguiling sensibility that makes one want to dance, even perhaps to win the West, and surely to win a war. These are, ultimately, powerful dresses.

And they tell an important—heretofore untold—story in fashion history. "American Ingenuity" is not a self-serving story of national pride, though The Costume Institute's long commitment to active education about American fashion is a satisfying vignette. We need only look around today to realize that what we see in this exhibition is today's style at its inception. In that, these dresses are creative beginners to which we are indebted for their art and ingenuity.

Philippe de Montebello
Director
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

INTRODUCTION

We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe.... We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds.

Ralph Waldo Emerson,
The American Scholar (1837)

The American woman is not entirely dependent upon Paris for the inspiration of her clothes. America, too, has imaginative designers, with a surety of touch and taste that cannot be surpassed. The art of designing is, relatively, so young in the United States, that the average woman is hardly aware of the group or originators of fashion who contribute so copiously to her wardrobe.

Virginia Pope, "Behind the Easter Parade of Fashion,"
The New York Times Magazine, April 21, 1935

City streets thronged with cars scuttling to such sites as glamorous Rockefeller Center. Passing models with hatboxes in hand. Lunch at Schrafft's or the Horn & Hardart Automat, or, quicker yet, a thin sandwich and orange juice at Chock Full o' Nuts, where food "was never touched by human hands." A modest family dinner at Patricia Murphy's Candlelight restaurant, jazz at the Hickory House on West 52nd, downtown at Albert French on 11th and University, or something extravagant at Forum of the Twelve Caesars. Late night at the Stork Club or Guy Lombardo in the Hotel Roosevelt. Mayor LaGuardia reading the funnies. President Roosevelt

Ensemble by Vera Maxwell. Jacket inspired by 1865 woman's waist (Gift of Miss Irene Lewisohn, CI 39.63.2a) and skirt inspired by Estonian woman's skirt (Gift of Mrs. Van S. Merle-Smith, CI 41.110.1b). From "A Designers' Exhibition of Costumes and Millinery Derived from Museum Documents," The Museum of Costume Art, October 14 to November 9, 1940.

and his dog, Fala. In fact, I remember little or none of this, but the history is so vivid to me, so indispensable a prequel to living in our time, that I am certain I was there: I am sure that I must have known Claire McCardell and those other women of genius who invented clothes for modern living, as likewise I am sure I know Edith Wharton's New York of an earlier time.

America—and New York in particular—has enjoyed innumerable golden ages, perhaps in every era in its past. E. L. Doctorow's memories and history, Henry James's soigné recollections, even the historical concoction of Caleb Carr's 1890s Manhattan come to mind, but none is more resplendent than the time—from the 1930s to the beginning of the 1970s—that is described by "American Ingenuity." That phenomenon of an American sportswear was chiefly defined on Seventh Avenue, with some support from the Connecticut and surrounding hillsides and from the sports- and car-oriented burgeoning West Coast, and was committed to making ready-to-wear and affordable fashion realistic and attractive to women of the epoch of the Great Depression through the American world hegemony.

The designers in this exhibition did not seek the grand style and the refinements of traditional fashion authority, and they exercised a remarkable independence from French couture. Significantly, they re-thought fashion from its very roots, not simply paring away some of the accretions of traditional prettiness but founding a new standard for a practical, modern style more in accord with the lives of women of their era. Furthermore, the chief impetus came from women designers, not from men. The sportswear tradition in America includes male manufacturers and a few early-generation pioneers such as Sydney Wragge and later John Weitz, but the

Ensemble by Clarepotter of Charles W. Nudelman, Inc. Inspired by Empire woman's riding habit (Gift of Lee Simonson, 1939, CI 39.13.42). From "A Designers' Exhibition of Costumes and Millinery Derived from Museum Documents," The Museum of Costume Art, October 14 to November 9, 1940.

driving force of fashion's fresh invention resides with the women who answered women's needs.

From October 14 to November 9, 1940, The Museum of Costume Art (which in 1945 became The Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art) presented "A Designers' Exhibition of Costumes and Millinery Derived from Museum Documents" in the International Building at Rockefeller Center, where The Museum of Costume Art was housed, chiefly at the behest and generosity of Nelson Rockefeller. The exhibition was, of course, being held at a time when American design was literally cut off from European fashion by World War II. The Museum of Costume Art had arranged for some of the most prestigious American designers to demonstrate how design ideas could be developed from museum artifacts. The designers selected are in two categories. Several represent the world of fine dresses and eveningwear that aspired to high style. Among such designers are Jo Copeland of Patullo Modes, Inc., Jean Louis Berthault and Norman Norell of Hattie Carnegie, Mark Mooring of Bergdorf Goodman, and Jessie Franklin Turner, along with milliners Sally Victor and Lily Daché. In all probability, these were the glamorous names of the exhibition. But the fledgling sportswear designers were also invited, among them Tom Brigance, Clarepotter of Charles E. Nudelman, Inc., Elizabeth Hawes, and Vera Maxwell. (The elided name Clarepotter—her given name is Clare Potter—recognizes a European tradition including such designers as Augustabernard or Louiseboulanger, or even American-transplant Mainbocher, who put two names into one.) Designers such as Leo Schmullen for Henri Bendel and Norman Norell for Hattie Carnegie offered grand creations in floor-length

Dress by Elizabeth Hawes. Inspired by woman's blouse from the island of San Blas, near Panama (Gift of Mary B. Howe, 1939, CI 39.62.3). From "A Designers' Exhibition of Costumes and Millinery Derived from Museum Documents," The Museum of Costume Art, October 14 to November 9, 1940.

dresses that seemed little inhibited by the War. The sportswear designers took their characteristic cues from such practical examples in The Museum of Costume Art's collection as Brigance's development of Tibetan man's trousers or Clarepotter's use of an Empire woman's riding habit. These practical choices were a habit of mind for the sportswear designers. They reveled in the commonplace and the practical. They found that Thoreauvian wellspring of invention and utility that is native to the American spirit. Their emulation was not of the Ozymandian grandeur of couture and high style but of the honest yearning to be ordinary and pragmatic.

The mission of The Museum of Costume Art to bring historical resources to the theater-design community of New York and, to a lesser extent, to the fashion designers of New York was being canted as early as 1940 toward a greater recognition of the industry's needs, as mandated by World War II. If only by such monumental historical accident, what would become The Costume Institute was early on an active agent in the definition of American sportswear, offering cultural samples and encouraging the kind of intellectual and emotional independence from convention and from Europe that became the style's hallmark.

By March-May 1945, at the War's end, The Museum of Costume Art was again uniting with the design community to foster new ideas based on the old. In the exhibition "American Fashions and Fabrics," textiles and clothing were designed, often in new materials, to represent the unceasing creativity of American fashion. In this exhibition, as five years earlier, a number of designers were involved, but some of the most distinctive contributions were

Pajama by Brigance of Lord & Taylor. Inspired by Tibetan man's costume (Gift of Irene Lewisohn, 1939, CI 39.91.37abc). From "A Designers' Exhibition of Costumes and Millinery Derived from Museum Documents," The Museum of Costume Art, October 14 to November 9, 1940.

by sportswear enthusiasts Clarepotter working with an Onandaga fabric and Claire McCardell working with a Wesley Simpson fabric in cotton piqué.

The link between invention in American sportswear and The Costume Institute was again renewed, though more obliquely, in 1972, by which time The Museum of Costume Art had become a curatorial entity of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The exhibition "Sporting Life" (July 12-November 12, 1972) explored sports functionalism; it emphasized, but was not restricted to, the Americans. While the exhibition's great historical allegiance was to the turn of the century, featured designers included McCardell, Cashin, Brigance, Halston, and Rudi Gernreich. At this time, Museum garments were still being worn on occasion on the model's body. In short, there is a connection between The Costume Institute and the incentive for new approaches to a practical American style. An engaged, activist history underlying ingenious sportswear would be insufficient cause to recognize that category of clothing if the contributions of the 1930s through the 1970s were not the persuasive forces in fashion history that they have proved to be. We live today indebted to McCardell, Cashin, Hawes, Wilkins, Leser, Maxwell, and the other women who liberated American fashion from the thralldom of Parisian design.

That independence came in tying, wrapping, stowing, eschewing ornament, harmonizing, and rationalizing the wardrobe, as practiced by these great designers in the era of the 1930s through the 1970s. They established the modern dress code, letting playsuits and other activewear outfits suffice for casual clothing; allowing pants to enter the wardrobe, often as an alternative in an outfit also offering a skirt; and prizing

Dinner pajamas by Clarepotter of Charles W. Nudelman, Inc. Onandaga rayon crêpe designed by staff artist Zue Martin from a German wheelock pistol of ca. 1580. From "American Fashions & Fabrics," The Museum of Costume Art, March 21 to May 1945.

rationalism and versatility in dress, in contradiction to dressing for an occasion or allotment of the day. The verbal gauntlet was colloquially thrown by Elizabeth Hawes, beginning with her best-selling book *Fashion Is Spinach* (1938), which assails the accepted authority of French fashion. "Fashion," Hawes claimed, "is so shrouded in mystery, so far away and so foreign, so complicated, and so boring when you understand its ways, that it has become a complete anachronism in modern life. One good laugh, and the deformed thief would vanish into the past." And so Hawes laughs derisively, chiefly at the pretentious hegemony of French design but secondarily at anyone who would follow fashion rather than determine her own needs. In *Fashion Is Our Business* (1945), Beryl Williams could write, "So American designers today, although they are vital, imaginative personalities in themselves, are more than that. As a professional group they are the sensitive, intelligent reflectors of what American women want them to be, creating what American women want to wear."

The rhetoric that was established by the 1940s confirms the facts and circumstances of the garments. Fashion in America was logical and answerable to the will of the women who wore it. Implicitly or explicitly, American fashion addressed a democracy, whereas traditional Paris-based fashion was authoritarian and imposed on women, willing or not. In an earlier time, American fashion had also followed the assumptions of Paris, or even copied and pirated specific French designs. In fact, much fashion is even today determined by a trickle down from high style, most notably the French couture. But there are countervailing forces, ones that began in the work of these intrepid designers of the 1930s.

Sport frock by Claire McCardell of Townley Frocks. Wesley Simpson cotton piqué designed by Bemelmans from a Pre-Dynastic Egyptian pottery jar of ca. 3600 B.C. From "American Fashions & Fabrics," The Museum of Costume Art, March 21 to May 1945.

Designer sportswear emanates from two primary sources. In the 1920s and 1930s, Jean Patou and Gabrielle Chanel emulated active sportswear in high-style knits and separates, inventing such fashion classics as Chanel's little black dress and cardigan-style suit. Soft construction and a primary interest in the mobility of limber, modern, even athletic women characterized the French model for designer sportswear. In the 1930s, American designer sportswear developed in part through the inspiration of women designers who were rationalizing the role of clothes in their modern, often suburban, lives in a new, unaffected way and in part due to the coalescence under the retailing and fashion visionary Dorothy Shaver of Lord & Taylor. In 1932, Shaver launched a series of in-store presentations that represented and recognized American designers by name. Instead of the label, usually the name of the manufacturer, the designer became the principal identifier, demonstrating Shaver's belief that these American designers were fully equal to their established European counterparts. Shaver's first cohorts in 1932 were Elizabeth Hawes, Muriel King, Annette Simpson, and Marie Reuss. Shaver was able to report in 1933: "Sponsoring a fashion is one thing. It remained to be seen whether the American public was ready to honor its own prophets. And it was! There was such a run on some of our American Designers' fashions that the manufacturer was unable to fill the demand. As a result of this stimulation, our sports shop has incidentally had the best season it has ever had—before or since the depression. All of which is most encouraging from a style point of view. It means that, as new demands and new situations arise in this country, we will not have to wait for Paris to interpret them for us. We shall have the

Suede and wool bicycling suit by Bonnie Cashin, 1972 (Gift of Bonnie Cashin, 1972, 1972.161.1-3 ab). From "The Sporting Life," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Costume Institute, July 12 to November 12, 1972.

courage to recognize the talent in our midst, the pride and interest in seeing that it is developed, the satisfaction of working out our own individuality."

Shaver's campaign for recognition of the distinctive American design aesthetic continued not only through Lord & Taylor but also in collaboration with Eleanor Lambert and others in establishing The Coty American Fashion Critics' Awards. The first ceremonies took place on January 22, 1943, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, honoring Norman Norell with a Winnie and bestowing special awards on Lily Daché and John Frederics. The department store executive and the public relations woman were an exceptional duo; in 1948, they established the Party of the Year, an annual fund-raiser that continues to be a defining social event and principal means of support of The Costume Institute of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. A review, however, of the first fifteen years of the Coty Awards demonstrates the competition between high-style American design and pragmatic, inventive designer sportswear. Among the winners have been Norell, Hattie Carnegie, Pauline Trigère, Charles James, and James Galanos, all makers of extraordinary clothing and worthy recipients in the tradition of elegance. Occasional visitors from the other coast, such as Adrian, a winner in 1944, represented Hollywood high style. But the Coty Awards always had a penchant for designer sportswear, as can be recognized by such honorees as Claire McCardell, Tina Leser, Emily Wilkens, Clarepotter, Bonnie Cashin, Vera Maxwell, Sydney Wragge, Anne Fogarty, and Anne Klein.

Designer sportswear was not usurped from Europe as "modern art" would later be; it was genuinely invented and developed in America. Its designers were not high-end with ancillary lines. The design objective and the

"Diaper" bathing suit by Claire McCardell, 1944 (Gift of Mrs. A. Moore Montgomery, 1970, 1970.153.3). From "The Sporting Life," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Costume Institute, July 12 to November 12, 1972.

business commitment were to sportswear, and the distinctive traits were problem-solving ingenuity and realistic lifestyle applications. This was clothing that considered ease of care: summer dresses and outfits, in particular, were chiefly cotton, readily capable of being washed and pressed at home. Closings were accessible, as the modern woman depended on no personal maid to dress her or to tie a corset at the back. The closures, themselves, were simple and practical, even before the restrictions on materials that occurred in the War years. American designer sportswear prized resourcefulness and assumed the nonchalant freedom of the woman who wore the clothing.

Many have argued that the women designers of this time were able to project their own clothing values into the new style. Thus, in *American Fashion Designers* (1935), one designer was profiled, "Clarepotter's chief success has been in the field of sportswear design, and this is only natural, for she herself is an accomplished sportswoman, enjoying particularly tennis and riding. She wears the kind of clothes she makes and makes the kind that all sportswomen adore: fabrics with a 'country' feel, subtle color schemes, no gadgets." Beryl Williams, in *Fashion Is Our Business* (1945), likewise correlated the authenticity of Louella Ballerino's mother-and-daughter fashions with "what sort of a person she is herself" and the fact that she was the mother with a daughter whom she regarded "with all the respect she feels for another adult." The paradigm is, of course, that art imitates life. A cognate lifestyle will serve as logical proof for the clothing.

Of course, much of this argument in the 1930s and 1940s was advanced because there was little or no experience in justifying apparel on the basis of utility. If Paris was cast aside, the tradition of fashion as beauty

was also to some degree slighted. Designer sportswear would have to be verified by a standard other than pure beauty; the emulation of a designer's life and designer sportswear was a crude version of this relationship. The consumer was ultimately to be mentioned as well, especially by the likes of Shaver, who could point to the sales figures at Lord & Taylor.

Could utility alone justify the new ideas of the American designers? Fashion is often regarded as a pursuit of beauty, and some cherish fashion's trivial relationship to the fine arts. What the designers of American sportswear proved was that fashion is a bona fide design art, answering to the demanding needs of service. If one imagines the beautiful dress, seldom does it come in one-size-fits-all or include pockets sufficient to the toting of all the implements and IDs important in modern life. This new fashion was to be considered and designed in tandem with modern architecture and design, ascribing primacy to function or functions. We might have to count the purposeful "success" of a dress in serving functions as important as an ideal of beauty. Does Claire McCardell's clever $6.95 "Popover" dress compare with a Dior or a Balenciaga? How does one compare the luminous common sense and enactment of a Thoreauvian American pragmatism with the possibilities of rich, philosophical dreaming? If a Platonic ideal of the beautiful dress was compromised, a suite of significant, life-enhancing options was offered in its place.

Of course, these practical, insightful designers have determined the course of late-twentieth-century fashion. They were the pioneers of gender equity, in their useful, adaptable clothing, which was both made for the masses and capable of self-expression.

Wrapping and Tying

Psychology, anthropology, and the cognate quests for origins have stressed the inescapable accord of the twentieth century with individual roots and the collective matrix. In tandem with twentieth-century culture in general, fashion has returned inexorably to basics, even eschewing the traditional governance of modern attire by pattern pieces and complex making processes. Apparel that has retrieved its beginnings comprises little more than a wrapping of the body.

For the women who pioneered designer sportswear, wrapping provided utility and signified root. Swathing, circulating fabric could be the rudimentary, primeval element for fashion conceived anthropologically. Peasant and vernacular forms of dress preserved such wrapping and tying in advance of or even in denial of mechanical closure and fastenings. But the haute couture and other forms of fashion had long esteemed the flow of fabric on the body and could simulate wet drapery and animate the surface by a textile's complexity. What the designer sportswear coterie developed was the application of this sensuous wrapping to ready-to-wear fashion. Spiralling and clinging, twisting and looping, enjoying the corrugated flat and emulating the three-dimensional, these elegant convolutions accommodated a variety of bodies and gave the garment a kind of subtle polymorphism. The exact measure that one associates with the haute couture was not compromised by the new polymorphism, but instead no one measure was of essential importance. A puffy dress or blouse can be pulled with ease a little longitudinally for the tall and a little latitudinally for the endowed. All of these dimensions are relative and expressive of the individual. Thus, in a Claire McCardell dress with wrapping, the precise measurement across the chest was perhaps balanced by another measure at the waist by which the entire cording system has to be judged. When McCardell eschewed bust darts, she knew that she could find volume in the twirling drapery at the bust or even in the wrapping below that could billow up the bodice. These critical strategies were unprecedented in the history of Western attire, allowing for a conditional dress,

Claire McCardell
Day suit, early 1950s
Navy linen and plaid cotton
Gift of Irving Drought Harris, in memory of Claire McCardell Harris, 1958
(CI 58.49.6ab)

The wrapping and tying basic to fashion were appreciated by McCardell, and she personally inflected these design elements. A wrapped collar can add personality, even on a fitted garment. Such a collar is mutable according to the individual who wears it and changeable according to the occasion to which it is worn. In addition to McCardell, high-style designers of the period, most notably Pauline Trigère, employed the same motif, and it is continued today, in the work of such American designers as Geoffrey Beene, Donna Karan, and Isabel Toledo and also in that of Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo for Comme de Garçons. The use of elements with provisional possibilities remains an animating factor, a final gesture akin to the flourish of an artist's signature.

harmonious to the many, in lieu of the garment designed to the unequivocal measure of an individual. In this striving, there was a democracy—even if naive compared to our pluralistic and more diversified model—that announced a commonality among many women with regard to their basic sizes and structures.

Wrapping and tying fit the extemporized dress to the body within. Yet the same processes assure that the garment's control and fit are governed by the woman who wears it at least as much as by the designer who makes it. In the midst of the invention of American sportswear, Dior's "New Look" rigidity and imposed form seemed a deliberate contradiction, not only in morphology (and in some cases not, as both Emily Wilkens and Anne Fogarty, for example, always liked slim waists) but also in the determination of control. In a wrapped McCardell or a Bonnie Cashin the shaping was not ceded to the designer; that assignment was given to the wearer, thereby assuring an element of relativity as opposed to a designer-imposed sovereignty. Hence, what is seen as a snug fit will be comfortable, never restrictive. Among the cohorts of women designers, there were many points of view on belting and cinching—Elizabeth Hawes, for example, finding belts largely superfluous, and McCardell often focusing on the belt. But restraint was not an abstraction; the device of wrapping and/or tying assured that the individual was never subject to a cinched cruelty equivalent to a corset. Wrapping under the torso (through the legs in the manner of diaper) guaranteed that the drape was not fixed but became contingent on the individual body; bows confirmed that dress

Claire McCardell
Day dress, spring 1944
Brown and polychrome cotton shirting
Gift of Claire McCardell, 1949
(CI 49.37.47ab)

Pockets are built into a McCardell dress in the overskirt or in the separate apron, as in this one. One can read the garment as an anticipation of Dior's concupiscent "New Look" with padded hips, which often, as in the 1947 "Bar Suit," arose out of the inflated peplum of the jacket. But high style and vernacular apparel are reconciled when the Dior effect is on a lowly apron, including pockets with side access. An apron and a tying neckline could suggest a Heidi-like innocence and thus a connection to folk tradition, but McCardell blended the common culture features of simple tying and waist and neckline with high fashion's impulse to articulate the waist and adjust decolletage.

Anne Fogarty
Dress, spring 1960
White silk shantung printed with floral motifs
Gift of Anne Fogarty, 1963 (CI X 63.3.9a-c)

An Empire silhouette in a silk floral personifies innocence and the folk tradition in dress, the one-step tying at waist and neckline suggesting versatility within simplicity. This dress also anticipates the later 1960s, conjuring up conscious memories of flower-child dressing. Seen adjacent to the 1944 McCardell at left, this Fogarty creation gives evidence of the persistent "primitivist" desire of sportswear in the middle years of the century to learn from vernacular dress and distill the modern from the ancient.

Claire McCardell
Dress, ca. 1950
Black rayon jersey
Purchase, Gifts from various donors, 1997
(1997.193.2)

Tying at the waist and neckline became elements used universally by McCardell. The folk tradition yielded to First Empire proto-modernism, especially in clothing for the evening. For McCardell, this plebeian and even rustic naturalism could be sustained for evening through the force of its simple lines and through its approximation to the haute-couture draping of Madeleine Vionnet and Madame Grès.

decisions were assigned to the wearer, not merely to the designer. Halston's late remark that the clients make the clothing only reifies this long-standing sportswear concept, letting individual expression take precedence over the power of the dress. One reason why inexpensive, versatile garments of the 1930s and 1940s have not always entered museum collections is that their owners consider them too personal, too subjective and body-particular—virtually intimate—to be offered to a museum.

Bias, tension, and stretch also come into play in the origami of wrapping, often allowing one material a virtuoso presence in a garment. To make ties, one can employ external materials, as was often done by Cashin, but one can also use the same material as that of the dress, implying an ecomony of production in which no scrap of material has been wasted. As a garment is made by pattern pieces and the effort of some of these designers is toward the simplification of those pieces and even to the one-piece garment, similar ties are merely the proof of utilizing every iota of material. Even as the provision of wrapping and tying suggests the individual, it also suggests the contingency of clothing to allow one to robe and disrobe quickly with ease, letting the barrier between dressed and undressed become permeable. Modern women have assumed not only ease in dressing but also the signs of ease in dressing, wanting to seem elegant without wanting to appear fussed-over or dressed-up. If dressing is reduced to a flick of the wrist, then dress becomes ineffably modern as well.

Wrapping and tying—the abiding forms of vernacular dress

Claire McCardell
"Popover" dress and detail, 1948-53
Navy-blue and white striped cotton shirting
Purchase, Gifts from various donors, 1980
(1980.404.3)

The versatility of the "Popover" originates from the idea that common materials associated with more tailored and fitted clothing seem entirely new when transferred to the format of the kimono wrap. In this instance, McCardell used shirting, which would more likely be associated with menswear. But while in a man's shirt the material would be constrained by cutting and sewing, here it becomes the fluid wrap of the dress, with the same material working effectively as the tie at the waist. Moreover, using cotton shirting with such fullness and conditional movement on the body effectively allows for enjoyment of the richness of textile, more often lost in the predictable, boxy, tailored forms of menswear. It was McCardell's genius, tempered by the realities of the War years, to recognize how luxurious mens' shirting could be, that it could be suitable to use for most luxurious robing.

that is both unadorned and basic—qualify as the elements of democratic dress as well. The *e pluribus unum* concept of the many melded into the one applies when dress is both uniform and individual, disciplined and free to express. The designers who founded sportswear on those principles were in that regard thinking like America's revered Founding Fathers. But they were mostly women, who were addressing and dressing modern women largely like themselves. They were defining at a reasonable price a ready-to-wear democracy that has become not only a national style but also the international style of the late twentieth century.

Claire McCardell
Dress (front and back), 1949-50
Royal Stewart plaid cotton
Gift of Irving Drought Harris, in memory of Claire McCardell Harris, 1958
(CI 58.49.19)

Wrapping provided for McCardell the shaping not only of the material itself but also of the sections of the body that remain uncovered. Thus, this McCardell dress, seen from front and back, offers very different views. In the 1950s, under the exceptional impact of the "New Look," McCardell could achieve the popular silhouette without sacrifice to her faith in wrapping and tying. Even the grand bow on this tartan plaid dress could make it in haughty circles of high fashion, even while never giving up simplicity of wrapping. Similarly, the plaid cotton, without pretense and with menswear associations, is rendered rich through the amplitude and abundance expressed in the feminine and practical bow.

Bonnie Cashin
Ensemble, spring 1962
Orange and mustard houndstooth-check wool mohair with mustard suede trim
Gift of Helen and Philip Sills Collection of Bonnie Cashin Clothes, 1979
(1979.431.35 ab)

Cashin adapted the Noh coat to serve as what was increasingly called in the 1950s and 1960s a "suburban coat" through her use of rich wool material and of a short length that is suitable for getting in and out of cars. A simple tying at the bust with fullness just below allowed one coat to serve countless women, just as one automobile model in the 1950s and 1960s was expected to win innumerable hearts commensurate with mass-production and the American abundance of the era.

Anne Klein
Blouse and skirt, ca. 1970
Striped silk and black hopsacking
Gift of M. N. Rubinstein, 1977
(1977.362.15.2ab)

Freeing the ostensible waist from the waistline, returning to the menswear and womenswear commonality of high waists in the 1810s and 1820s, Anne Klein added the lacing of active sportswear and riding apparel for which snug fit is absolutely essential but is accommodated to the individual body. A riding skirt cannot be so loose as to become entangled with horse and gear; active apparel cannot swivel and sway on the body. Using the indigenous device of tying, Klein extrapolated a smart principle: flattering, body-subjective tautness.

Claire McCardell
Dress, 1943
Brown, white, and green checked cotton
Gift of Claire McCardell, 1949
(CI 49.37.41)

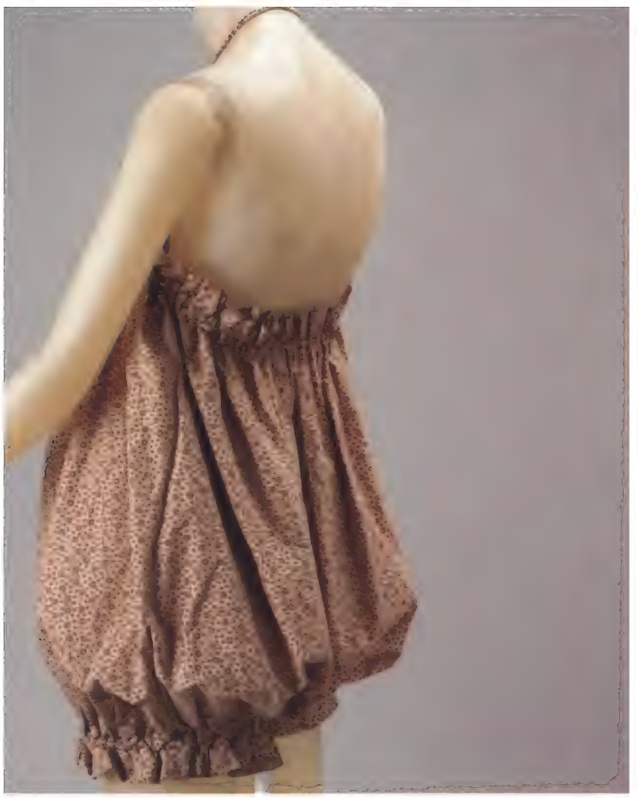
From the full skirt through the clinging wrap of the bodice, McCardell has here demonstrated her acute understanding of Madame Grès and Madeleine Vionnet. In fact, the wrapping in this dress, while variable according to the needs of the individual body of the wearer, gives the effect of being as precisely calculated and measured as any product of the couture. McCardell understood differing bodies, but she was not arriving at a mean point, nor was she tolerating the lack of fit of 1990s dress. Instead, she was looking for the dress that seemed perfect and as consummately fitted as any couture garment even though it was mass-produced.

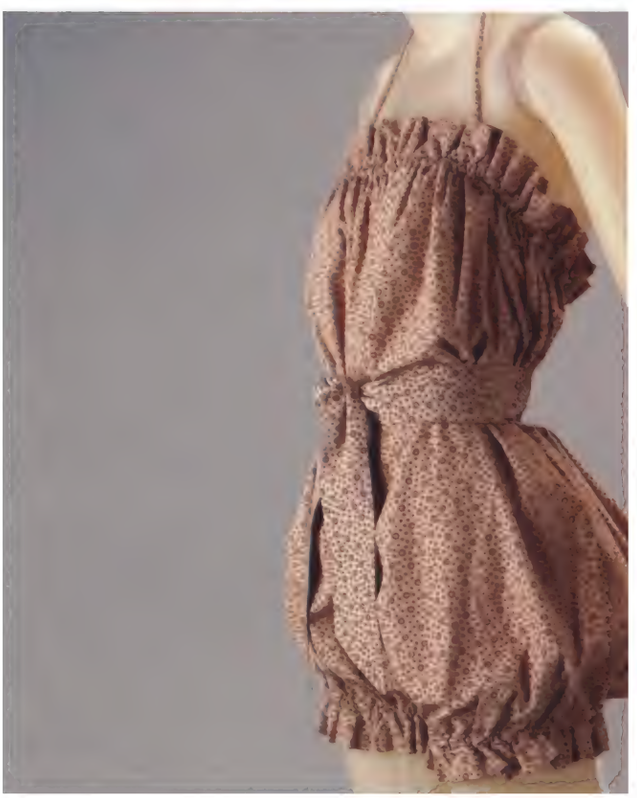
Claire McCardell
Evening gown, 1939
Brown-and-white striped silk satin
Gift of Ruth Underhill, 1958 (CI 58.17.2)

Only a magician with a quick twisting, snapping, enveloping legerdemain could make this McCardell dress. On the hanger, it is limp, amorphous, and trailing; on the body it traces the voluptuous peregrination of a Madame Grès bodice, but not one that is fixed into position or held forever for the couture client. Rather, the McCardell is ready-to-wear, and it is adaptable to a myriad of body types and proportions. The striped silk reinforces the curlicues and corkscrews of the bodice and accentuates the columnar skirt. The crisscrossed bodice is accomplished by two pieces of fabric, contingent on the body but with the effect of a perfectly contrived origami.

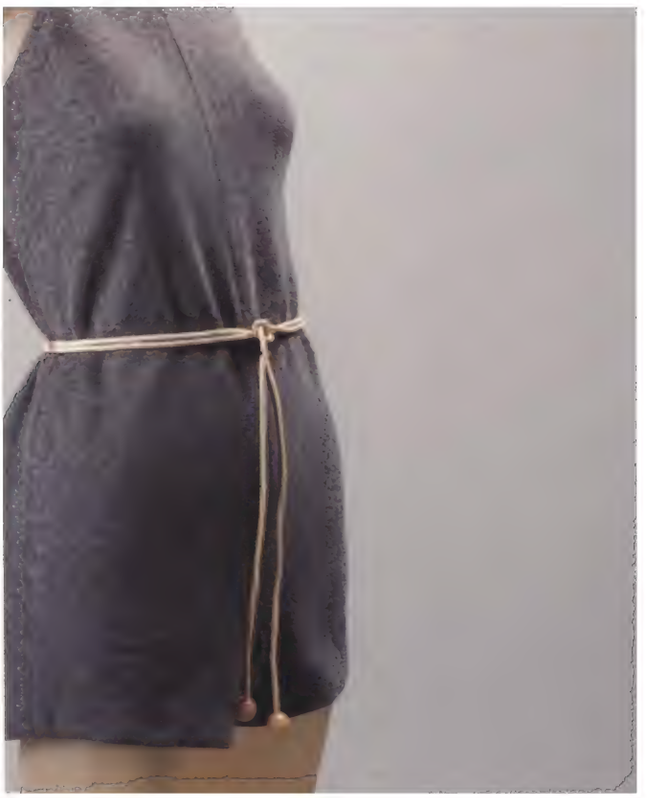
Claire McCardell
Bathing suit (unbelted and belted), 1944
Beige printed cotton
Gift of Claire McCardell, 1949
(CI 49.37.20 a,b)

At a time when most swimwear was made of wool, McCardell understood the precepts of the new reforms in dress, and she revoked the authority that wool had maintained from the nineteenth century. She knew the discomfort of the wool bathing suit, both when dry or when wet, and came up with—along with Tina Leser, Carolyn Schnurer, and other contemporaries—the cotton swimsuit and its companion, the playsuit. The new swimsuit allowed for fresh silhouettes appropriate for cotton. Wool would never have permitted the puffy, provisional forms of this joyous bathing suit. McCardell treasured cotton's rich dilations and ballooning, along with its positive feel on the body.





Claire McCardell
Bathing suit, ca. 1945
Gray wool knit
Purchase, Gifts from various donors, 1980 (1980.404.1ab)



Friar or bathing beauty? McCardell's honest delight in the body and its freedom of expression was complemented by her propensity to the ascetic, and even religious, thinking that is reminiscent of monastic dresses and resulted in surprisingly monkish swimwear. With regard to utility, she plumbed a very American combination in her blend of the abstemiousness that we associate with Thoreau's conception of economy and the pleasure that we might rightly associate with a simple, unencumbered silhouette for going swimming.

Bonnie Cashin
Dress, fall 1967
Gray and camel wool fleece with camel leather trim
Gift of Helen and Philip Sills Collection of Bonnie Cashin Clothes, 1979 (1979.431.75 a,b)

In the leather and wool combinations that Cashin favored, the rich contrast of materials was enhanced by the colors of gray and camel. Both colors are taken from menswear and both are utilitarian, but they are made tactile and sensuous in this combination. The lyric sincerity of an Empire waist cinched with tying leather makes the materials, as they are used here, feel feminine and malleable.

Left:
Claire McCardell
Evening gown, late 1940s-early 1950s
Black-and-red silk plush
Purchase, Polaire Weissman Bequest and Gifts from various donors, 1997 (1997.511a-d)

A bravura swag of drapery cuts across the chest with the elegance of a Madame Grès bodice and the implicit protocol of a sash or banner. Applying the same principles of wrapping that animated her daywear, McCardell also wrapped for evening, letting the ease of a plush evening gown define the body with a gentle boldness.

Claire McCardell
Raincoat, 1948
Red cotton twill
Gift of Irving Drought Harris, in memory of Claire McCardell Harris, 1958 (CI 58.49.17)

The multiplicity of options offered in this raincoat's collar transforms a rainy-day necessity into something personal and creative. And McCardell has also thought of practical matters; big crescent pockets (which are inspired by menswear breast pockets), articulated in white stitching at the upper chest, allow for dry stowage. In the 1947 "Corolle" or "New Look" collection, Dior had perched tiny buttons at the bust; McCardell has made roomy, usable pockets.

Clare Potter
Day dress, 1937-38
Black linen and crocheted beige linen yarn
Gift of Janet Chatfield-Taylor, 1962
(CI 62.4.4 a,b)

Beryl Williams said of Clare Potter, "She likes easy-flowing lines and no trimmings that 'stuck on' to detract from the almost classically simple designs of most of her clothes." Combining flat black linen with crochet, Potter achieved the effect of ornament and even handcraft, while employing neither. Instead, she let the dress's simple construction work to its greatest advantage while withholding any ornament. *American Fashion Designers* in 1935 praised Potter, noting, "Her ideas come not from Paris, but from simply being a very wide-awake, active person who understands the wardrobe requirements of the American woman."

Claire McCardell
Day dress, mid-1950s
Off-white fancy-weave cotton
Gift of The Estate of Phyllis Riehl Williams, 1996 (1996.141.10)

The pretty simplicity of a cotton shirtwaist is finessed by a simple tying at the collar, every effect and every detail suggesting the homespun and serviceability. For McCardell, the new woman who synthesized the urban and the suburban was, in fact, chiefly inspired by the American West and appreciated the simplest touches of vernacular clothing with an emphasis on the rustic. The world at mid-century and ever since, inflected by suburban sprawl and by automobile culture, is ultimately adversarial to the landscape and naturalism. McCardell, however, addressed an older American ideal, believing in a resurgent American pastoral quality in dress.

Diane Von Furstenberg
Wrap-dress, ca. 1975
Green-and-white dotted cotton/Rayon blend jersey
Gift of Richard Martin, 1997 (1997.487)

A climax to the American sportswear wrapping tradition came in the 1970s via the sensation of Von Furstenberg's wrap dress. Its fundamental form was already deeply embedded in the American designer sportswear tradition; a new woman designer translated the style into 1970s fabrics and colors, generally brighter, bolder, and more synthetic (and stretchy) than the early examples to which the silhouette and design principle are indebted.

Halston
Shirtwaist dress, 1972
Lavender Ultrasuede
Gift of Faye Robson, 1993 (1993.351ab)

Wrapping, tying, and folding were all habits of mind for Halston. That the designer prized simplicity is evident in his most famous millinery achievement, the pillbox hat. In this Ultrasuede shirtwaist, perhaps his greatest dressmaking success, he offered a versatile sportswear icon in a new material, allowing for countless individual expressions through personal styling.

Bonnie Cashin
Dress and coat, spring 1964
Tan doubleknit wool and brown-and-white wool mohair with tan suede trim
Gift of Helen and Philip Sills Collection of Bonnie Cashin Clothes, 1979 (1979.431.47 a,b)

Robust materials seized from hardy men's outerwear became coin of the realm for Cashin, who tied and latched these rugged materials with aplomb. Gender-shared outerwear is now commonplace, but it was chiefly Cashin's invention. In the 1960s, asymmetrical tying was sufficient to render the style feminine.

L A T C H I N G

Buttons are a frequent and predictable form of fastening in fashion. In the eighteenth century, when life moved at a slower pace and more hands were assigned to the tasks of dressing, provisional sewing was often used to baste or sew together garment parts, even for a single wearing. In the twentieth century, zippers have offered fashion a new mechanism for allowing a garment, put on the body loosely, to adhere snugly. Zippers were first associated only with the most utilitarian fashions, until Elsa Schiaparelli called attention to them and recognized in them a favorable technology for fashion.

If Schiaparelli authorized the zipper, now indispensable to fashion at every level, the designer sportswear inventors opened up countless new ways to fasten. Some were introduced in the 1940s, when World War II's restrictions on materials available for the civilian market made improvisation a necessity, but many grew out of the larger canvasing of materials effective in providing secure closure. Lingerie and underwear, already plundered for their materials, were recognized for their strategic use of small hook-and-eye fastenings that did not add bulk to the garment but did promote trim closure.

Snaps, mechanical but capable of embellishment, were an important device for closing in designer sportswear. Their mechanism, not hidden but rather providing a visual pleasure akin to the functionalism of studding for reinforcement, was made evident especially in work by Bonnie Cashin. Both Cashin and Vera Maxwell played with the principles of coveralls and union suits, each allowing for the body necessity of the drop seat, formerly closed with buttons but now more securely snapped into position.

Cashin looked even further afield for her fasteners. In the same manner as that of her ingenious combinations of wool and leather, Cashin considered sturdy luggage and carryalls and brought their utility to clothing. Thus, the luggage fasteners on Cashin's coats and tops declared that they were worthy of use, not mere buttons of a feminine ilk. Other declarative buttons, in the form of acorns

Bonnie Cashin
Dress and detail, spring 1973
Mauve doubleknit jersey and avocado-green suede
Gift of Helen and Philip Sills Collection of Bonnie Cashin Clothes, 1979
(1979.431.108 a,b)

A cropped jersey top, with shoulder snaps, is combined with a copious suede skirt. Cashin was sympathetic to the body-visibility and body-acuity of the 1970s. Having long been a pioneer, she was as ready to accommodate the body as she was to continue to experiment with the versatility of suede for spring and the uses of practical fasteners. In this ensemble that depends on piping and outlining, the shoulder snaps merely emphasize the design.

Photograph, 1973. Bonnie Cashin Archives, Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library (1980.404.1 a,b)

or with American flag embellishment, suggested that when buttons were used, they, too, were to be rendered proudly and straightforwardly, declaring their importance as service tools instead of feigning a role as a small decorative accessory. Cashin's dog-leash skirt, hiked up by the easy use of the flexible metal pin most often associated with the dog leash, called attention to the vernacular device in a way only later equaled by the safety pin of London punk.

Fastening and closure were not secrets of the new designer sportswear. They were instead exposed and expounded service elements, in which fashion's traditional etiquette was violated by the introduction of new materials suggesting the mechanical and not the mannerly. Active sportswear was demanding this new repertoire of latchings and closures, and the makers of designer sportswear realized in these utilitarian forms the beauty of service and simplicity. To have continued to hide closure within the garment and not to seek its modernization would have been in contradiction to the sportswear ethos of truth to materials and truth to purpose. Like wrapping and tying, latching was ostentatious, proud in methodology and brilliant in innovation.

Bonnie Cashin
Evening ensemble and detail, fall 1964
Turquoise suede and blue, turquoise, and green striped wool mohair
Gift of Helen and Philip Sills Collection of Bonnie Cashin Clothes, 1979
(1979.431.50 a,b)

The wearer is ready for day or evening in this elegant ensemble. As rustic, tactile, and colorful as Cashin's favored mohair is, this outfit works chiefly in terms of silhouette. The profusion of skirt materials can be pulled up and even stuffed into pockets ("retoussée dans les poches") to create a look like the style of the late eighteenth century. The Cashin silhouette, however, is more simply achieved with a dog-leash fastener. A fashion writer said she always called this favorite her dog-leash skirt in recognition of that simple hardware. The effect is to winch up the cloth and make the mohair more layered and luxurious by a profoundly simple hitch. A suede bodice, a surprising element for evening, provides a luxurious contrast as well.

Claire McCardell
Evening gown (back and front) and detail, ca. 1952
Plaid shagbark (Galey & Lord) cotton
Gift of Irving Drought Harris, in memory of Claire McCardell Harris, 1958
(CI 58.49.11)

A textile marvelous to the touch and the eye is realized on the body through McCardell's elegant triangulation. McCardell always gave the effect of using every scrap of fabric, enjoying the economy of wasting nothing. In this instance, the richness of the textile is the perfect complement to her spare dressmaking, suggesting a perfect alignment of triangles and curves, letting us feel that no little bit of fabric has been wasted. Boot-hook closures only reinforce the sense of utmost economy.

Bonnie Cashin
Jumpsuit, fall 1967
Orange-and-olive doubleknit wool jersey
Gift of Helen and Philip Sills Collection of Bonnie Cashin Clothes, 1979 (1979.431.73)

These are long-johns. A jersey jumpsuit, as boldly striped as the outfit of a convict on a chain gang, features every device of designer sportswear Snaps replace what might otherwise be the buttons denounced by Anthropologist Bernard Rudofsky and others as archaic; the waist is tied closed and could well have been accompanied by a leather skirt or apron; and even the drop seat of the union suit is honored in this apparel that thinks of every convenience.

Claire McCardell
Bathing suit/playsuit, ca. 1950
Black-and-brown striped silk faille
Purchase, Gifts from various donors, 1980
(1980.404.2 a,b)

Bold sportswear stripes are graphic on a two-piece bathing suit or playsuit by McCardell. The designer played with the orientation of the stripes (which go one way on the top and another on the shorts) to offset top against bottom and to emphasize the separation between the boy-shorts bottom and the bodice. But the effect is also like boating flags and signs, and the piece is as vibrant and graphic as summer itself.

Bonnie Cashin
Suit and detail, fall 1964
Magenta and plum checked wool mohair, plum wool doubleknit and plum suede
Gift of Helen and Philip Sills Collection of Bonnie Cashin Clothes, 1979
(1979.431.51 a-c)

Cashin appropriated the ingenious toggle closings of luggage to provide the center-front regimen of this suit, whose shaping with a rectangular torso seems as much Chinese as Western. Asian dress used frogs and other clever closings that opened the Western mind and imagination to something more than buttons, and Cashin is inspired by such differences that originated in the East to arrive at a wholly new solution to the closure of a garment.

Claire McCardell
Sundress, ca. 1956
Red, blue, yellow, and black plaid cotton
Gift of Irving Drought Harris, in memory of Claire McCardell Harris, 1958 (CI 58.49.5)

On the hanger, this McCardell dress is nothing other than a huge tentlike A-line dress with a modicum of gathering in the back. Its form is wholly assumed on the body when the belting causes the fullness of the skirt to be realized and the dimensions of waist to shoulders and the projection of the bust give silhouette to the halter top. Once again, the grid discipline of the cotton plaid complements the fluffy, amorphous contingency of the dress. McCardell designed for herself, but the truth is that the transformative possibilities of her clothing allow for one modern woman and thereby for every modern woman.

Claire McCardell
Dress, 1938
Black novelty-weave wool
Gift of Claire McCardell, 1949
(CI 49.37.15 a,b)

A monastic shape that risks severity is, as in the plaid dress on the facing page, ultimately dependent on the individual body within via use of the wrapping function of the belt. McCardell knew the importance of the belt as the defining element, and here she introduced a kind of whimsy and pleasure in a belt that may relieve the dress from its pleated rigor just as elsewhere she played off textile grids against fluidity.

S T O W I N G

In the 1930s and 1940s, the pioneering women designers of American sportswear—most notably Claire McCardell, Bonnie Cashin, and Vera Maxwell, but also Tina Leser, Emily Wilkens, Louella Ballerino, and Clarepotter—provided pockets, most often conspicuous, occasionally unobtrusive, but always present in their modern fashion. They defied the operating convention of the era: that men possess some twenty or more pockets, and women have no capacious pockets. As Bernard Rudofsky wrote in *Are Clothes Modern?* in 1947, "A fully dressed man of the twentieth century commands the use of two dozen pockets. Assuming that they could all be utilized and loaded with things—pockets originated as useful appendages—the sorting out and filling up, the extracting of the pocketed objects would be a stately business." Rudofsky goes on to point out that most of a man's pockets are not used and thus constitute "degeneracy of functional clothing." The excess in men's pockets was the counterpart to the dearth of pockets for women. Without them, one is inevitably ill-equipped. With them, one is a *bricoleur*.

Among the notably disabling elements of women's fashion—corsets and high heels, for example—the absence of pockets has been little noticed. Fashion history proves that the tailored clothing of modern menswear developed through the nineteenth century offered multiple pockets in every layer, inside and out, while women's apparel was all but bereft of pockets and never possessed even one of reasonable size for significant carrying purposes. Instead, women were either encumbered with carrying purses and pocketbooks or left with no place to stow their gear and thus were rendered unable to participate in the commerce and conveniences of modern life. Absence of pockets is a real social handicap long perpetuated in women's fashion. Designer sportswear would allow that injustice no longer: outer pouches were attached, lateral bags were strapped on in the manner of saddlebags, and deep pockets appeared in skirts and tops.

The trailblazing women designers of sportswear active in the 1930s and

Tina Leser
Sweater, 1950
Black wool knit
Gift of Tina Leser of Edwin H. Forman, Inc., 1951 (CI 51.14.3a)

Bonnie Cashin
Skirt and detail, 1954
Black-and-white houndstooth check wool
Gift of Bonnie Cashin, 1982 (1982.40.3)

Cashin deliberately secured the purse to the skirt, incorporating its holding function directly into it. No mugger would be able to steal this purse! A security is built into this device as well as a common-sense utility.

1940s built in visible, spacious pockets, allowing women to become independent of handbags and cognate encumbrances. That pockets became a clothing agenda in this era was inspired by an ethos of pragmatism. Some sources were in regional, often non-Western, dress, but the essential impulse was to be modern, practical, and equitable. The impetus was to make fashion answer to women's lives, not to impair them. In McCardell's "Popover" dress the reach of the deep pocket even extends to the oven mitt stored therein.

If we could only think of the modern woman as one who can be independent of externally toted bags and purses! We are indebted to the American originators of designer sportswear for this concept. Their French counterparts knew the principle: to wit, a Chanel suit offers some pockets. But that principle was of negligible visual presence for the Europeans: the Americans—both the designers and the women who wore the dresses and skirts—flaunted their pockets as emancipation.

Fred Picard and Bobbie Yeoman
Golf dress and detail, 1947
Brown cotton chambray
Gift of Bloomingdale Brothers Inc., 1947
(CI 47.74.25 a,b)

As active sports have always influenced dress, beginning with croquet, bicycling, and the racquet sports, the pretext of a golf dress makes a side pocket indispensable. Like a reticule added to the silhouette of the garment, this golf dress with side pocket is not about the secrecy and privacy of wallets and personal carrying but about tees and balls that might be added to the cargo. Of course, a golf bag is outfitted with many pockets, but the active life requires the convenience of pockets carried on the person as well.

Claire McCardell
"Popover" dress, 1942
Blue linen
Gift of Claire McCardell, 1945
(CI 45.71.2 a,b)

Sally Kirkland, in *All-American: A Sportswear Tradition*, reported that the McCardell "Popover" dress sold at $6.95. Kirkland wrote, "The Popover sold in the thousands (its low price was because it was classified as a 'utility garment' and Claire's manufacturer, Adolph Klein, of Townley, was able to make a special deal with labor). But some form of wraparound dress around $25 or $30 was always in Claire's collection thereafter, and she liked denim so much she made coats and suits of it for townwear complete with the workman's double topstitching as a form of decoration.... Norman Norell once told me that 'Claire could take five dollars worth of common cotton calico and make a dress a smart woman could wear anywhere.'" In utility achieved with ingenuity, McCardell found a synergy. The modern woman could both be chic and do the cooking. In a photograph by Louise Dahl-Wolfe, the model wearing the "Popover" has one hand in the oven mitt and the other in her capacious pocket.

Vera Maxwell
Travel ensemble (jacket, slacks, and blouse) and detail, 1948
Brown-and-white donegal tweed and cocoa-brown wool jersey, printed silk, plastic, and tan leather
Gift of Vera Maxwell, 1953 (CI 53.61 a-f)

The new possibilities for travel prompted many reasoned changes in womenswear. Clothing had to be versatile, suitable to differing weather, and capable of travelling or being packed without crushing and looking rumpled. Maxwell addressed those many demands and then added plastic-lined pockets for the ultimate in practicality. Diaper, washcloth, toothbrush, and other necessities could be carried with ease in such sensible pockets. Yet for Maxwell, as for Cashin and McCardell, the pockets are purposefully conspicuous; they are declared in the design as if to challenge the utility of similar outfits made without their functional and prosaic benefits. Maxwell offered an intelligent equilibrium, reminiscent of an architectural functionalism that deliberately benefits from its most practical features.

HARMONIZING

Separates, layering, and versatile uses produce apparel that is not foreordained but that is ultimately in the hands of the women who wear the clothing. Constituent parts are made by the mix-and-match principles of a complex, variable puzzle that allows the wearer to arrange and assemble the pieces.

This principle, first present in the components of "separates dressing," depends on individual units such as skirt, blouse, sweater, and jacket. By the 1930s and 1940s, travel and the complex lives of women increasingly called for slacks, shorts, culottes, and other variations in dress. The wardrobe for plane travel had to be suitable for different parts of the world and for the woman who was getting on the plane as a businesswoman and getting off as a mother on vacation. Elements of dress were joined into one outfit in which multiple variations could address the increased complications of a busy life. The Jet Age and the growing fears of lost luggage that have accompanied it have only exacerbated the process. Both Claire McCardell and Vera Maxwell thought of this new air traveler. Travel was also complemented by weekend clothing that could be suitable for proper dining but also harmonized with relaxed separates. As Sally Kirkland extolled, "Vera Maxwell introduced the 'weekend wardrobe' concept in five interchangeable pieces of Donegal tweed and gray flannel, which got you there in cardigan and skirt, let you lounge in slacks, and even beagle in a pleated play skirt with knee socks." Formal or informal, suburban or international, speedy travel was to change the modern wardrobe forever. As Kirkland described, the phenomenon of separates dressing was only growing in the 1940s: "America's love for separates grew even more in this time too as 'do-it-yourself' types eschewed French copies in favor of buying one or two longer skirts and playing around with various tops and accessories for their own New Look, easy to manage and vary with the occasion." Indeed, the ethos of do-it-yourself is a powerfully American spirit, fostering self-reliance and self-expression even in a time when fashion elements are purchased ready-to-wear.

Tina Leser
Bathing suit and beach cover-up, late 1940s
White wool twill printed with raspberry and lime-green stripes
Gift of Mary M. Rumsey, 1994
(1994.582.6a,b)

With a verve that anticipates Perry Ellis in the 1970s, Leser employed bands of color as a modernist in painting would and combined a loose coat with a viable bathing suit as a modernist in fashion would. The abstraction resides in the purity of form and economy of means. Leser carried the color stripes of an inner garment into the collateral wrap, allowing the bathing suit the possibility of a life beyond the beach itself. Ultimately, resort and leisure style of this kind becomes coin of the realm, allowing many in sunny vacation cities to use the swimsuit as the core of the day wardrobe.

But the outcome was often idiosyncratic and personal. Moreover, separates were relatively inexpensive: the investment in a dress was not always required if an ensemble could be updated chiefly by switching one old and worn element for one new one.

Travel implied layering as well. The versatility of dressing once for the entire day also involves layering, allowing one outfit to go from cool morning to hot midday to cool evening. The addition and subtraction of elements became an important part of dress management. Moreover, separates increasingly found their way into mainstream stores, sometimes even weakening the dress business that had been womenswear's keystone: once the stepchildren of retailing, separates have now become not only main-floor items but the mainstay of convenient retailing as well.

One might always have hoped that ready-to-wear fashion would become a collaboration of some kind between the consumer and the designer. After all, old-style dressmaking had once given the consumer the opportunity to govern the process, from choice of textile to specifics of appearance and silhouette. Now, ready-to-wear—the very process that might have seemed to stifle individual expression—became the means to achieve personal choice from among the components of fashion. That satisfying self-expression could also prudently accompany a happy sense of economy, not having to buy unnecessarily but in discrete units. Fashion responded in collections such as Anne Klein's, which defied obsolescence—the fashion shibboleth—by keeping interchangeable elements in production season after season, in analogy to menswear.

Bonnie Cashin
Day ensemble (2 views), 1967
Natural cotton canvas, red-and-blue plaid wool, and blue wool jersey
Gift of Bonnie Cashin, 1968 (CI 68.34 a-c)

This day ensemble equalizes men and women without surrendering to menswear design. The conical shape of the swing jacket in canvas is definitely womenswear, though its special ingenuity resides in Cashin's eminently practical dog-leash latching, whereas the plaid trousers could easily come from the menswear wardrobe of a misguided golfer.

Bonnie Cashin
Day ensemble (sweater and skirt), ca. 1956
Olive-green wool knit and tartan wool with leather trim
Gift of Helen and Philip Sills Collection of Bonnie Cashin Clothes, 1979 (1979.431.6 a,b)

Sweater and skirt are paired up as coordinated separates. Cashin made the point by bringing the tartan to the trim of the buttonline at the center-front of the sweater. Twin sets, similar sweaters, and every other variation on the theme that could be imagined has happened in the past fifty years, yet even such familiarity cannot deny the plain good sense of the coordination achieved through the possibilities of layering.

Claire McCardell
Sports ensemble, 1944
Black linen
Gift of Claire McCardell, 1949
(CI 49.37.30 a,b)

Basic black linen is hardly basic to the repertoire of women's clothing in the 1940s, so McCardell's use was startling. She softened the blow of her cross-seasonal aesthetic by adding the prosaic touch of white double-stitching, itself derived from denim. In the wrap skirt, side-access pockets are also delineated by the white stitching, making the power of these pockets conspicuous.

Fox-Brownie
Day ensemble and detail, 1947
Gold, gray, brown, and green printed white silk and gold wool fleece
Gift of Bloomingdale Brothers Inc., 1947
(CI 47.74.17 a-c)

Up-scale, yet also down-to-earth, Fox-Brownie (variously Foxbrownie or hyphenated) generally designed in European fabrics, especially silk. This day ensemble anticipates much that will happen in American clothing, combining a dress with charming textile with a serviceable coat that can be worn both for warmth and to formalize the ensemble. The coat is lined with the silk textile of the dress. The visuals, which show not a dude occupation but the hard worker of the land, touch on the paintings of both Pieter Brueghel and the American Regionalist Thomas Hart Benton.

Anne Fogarty
Day dress and coat and detail, fall 1957
Red wool twill
Gift of Anne Fogarty, 1963 (CI 63.47.3 a,b)

Versatility and resonance were built into 1950s clothes, which often repeated the material of a dress in the lining of its complementary coat. Fogarty had the military order in mind when she coordinated a tailored coat with a knit dress. While Fogarty more often created to high style and was able to write a book entitled *Wife Dressing* in 1959, she nonetheless thought in terms of ingenious pragmatism. Belying the book's title, she wrote with some toughness, "If I had to boil down my thinking about clothes into one word, that word would be DISCIPLINE—of the mind, the body, and the emotions. DISCIPLINE makes you the woman you are rather than a hodgepodge of everyone else's ideas chosen without consideration of your own coloring and proportions." This is a disciplined ensemble.

Geoffrey Beene
Day ensemble and detail, ca. 1965
Purple-and-black synthetic twill
Courtesy Amy Fine Collins

The genesis of Beene's style is innovative sportswear. Even before he moved to the full fluidity of his mature style, Beene displayed his command of sportswear, which is demonstrated in this ensemble that shows influences of Cashin but also has a distinctly Beene attitude. Two deep pockets in front and the elegant nonchalance of tying an Empire waist complement a coat inspired by riding coats, even to the details of the back pleating.

Bonnie Cashin
Ensemble (dress and cape), 1956
Red-and-brown houndstooth-check wool with red leather trim
Gift of Bonnie Cashin, 1982 (1982.40.2 a,b)

Sherlock Holmes, that most famous London-based detective, could not have been more elegantly outfitted than the woman who wears this harmonic dress and cape ensemble by Cashin. The houndstooth-check cozy wool would be equally appropriate in Scotland Yard as it is on the modern woman who wants warmth, comfort, and elegance all wrapped into one ensemble. Elementary is the closure on the cape, secure and unpretentious.

Anne Fogarty
Cocktail dress and jacket, fall 1955
Gray wool flannel with embroidered silk satin trim
Gift of Anne Fogarty, 1959 (CI 59.16.6 a,b)

For Fogarty, clothing elements worked together to create multipurpose dressing. This cocktail dress with decorative trim is matched with a short jacket, or spencer, that suppresses the decorative band but offers a well-cut military impression. The woman who wears this outfit does more than put on an additional layer of warmth with the jacket; she also transforms the reading of the ensemble. One might think she has changed during the course of the cocktail and dinner hour, but she has simply worn or doffed her jacket, and she appears complete and coherent in both stages.

Bonnie Cashin
Suit, 1973
Brown, black, and white tweed with brown suede trim
Gift of Mary Alan Hokanson, 1983 (1983.48 a-c)

The chic, considered aggregate of modern dress was in détente by 1973. Separates could be combined more freely than ever, yet there was always the possibility of coordinating a complete outfit, made up of aggregates often sold in parts and capable of being combined with other parts, not even necessarily from the same season's collection. A hallmark of the Cashin style is the trimming of wool with leather; here, sensual materials converge.

Vera Maxwell
Ensemble (dress and jacket), spring 1961
Olive-green linen and natural raw silk
Gift of Vera Maxwell, 1967 (CI 67.36.13 a-c)

Inside and out, in the layering and the linings, the sportswear ensemble of the 1960s was a carefully planned musical composition that depended on continuous relationships among the parts. For Maxwell, it was a natural gesture to repeat the material of the dress for the lining of the coat, creating inner rhythm even if it was not immediately perceptible. Moreover, the soft coat is shaped like a dress. Unity was to be recognized, but it was also innate to the planning of the garment as an ensemble.

Vera Maxwell
Day ensemble, spring 1961
Olive-green linen and undyed raw silk printed with fishing flies
Gift of Vera Maxwell, 1967
(CI 67.36.11a-c)

This jacket that catalogs fishing flies acts as an easy, smocklike top for a linen dress, which it complements with informal grace. The free form of the smock jacket suggests both the ethnic and vernacular globalism of sportswear and its full capacity to realize the most casual effects within coordinated dressing. If there were unrelated parts, the whole might seem too informal; Maxwell's sportswear caught an equilibrium between the casual and spontaneous energy of apparel and the planned aggregate of a disciplined, coordinated attire.

Bill Blass
Evening ensemble (halter gown and coat), early 1970s
Ivory jersey with rhinestone trim and ivory cashmere
Gift of Mrs. John H. Gutfreund, 1995
(1995.337.5 a,b)

Blass composed layered and related dressing with a mastery that is famed. In this instance, the gown has a bare beauty, and the simple robelike coat is a perfect match in ivory cashmere. The uncomplicated ease and soft luxuriousness of the coat also suggest another sportswear advantage: here is a coat one can snuggle in.

Valentina (Valentina von Schlee)
Evening ensemble, ca. 1935
Pale gray silk ottoman
Gift of Igor Kamlukin, 1995
(1995.245.5 a,b)

While Valentina is chiefly associated with the high style of her era, her fashion aesthetic is compatible with sportswear, especially in the use of practical materials. Like Trigère, who incorporated sportswear's wrapping and tying into the French scarves and mantles of her elegant attire, Valentina understood wrapping, tying, and lacing as gestures for modern fashion.

Claire McCardell
Dinner suit, 1935
Black angora wool
Gift of Claire McCardell, 1949
(CI 49.37.4 a,b)

This McCardell dinner suit with jacket suggests the wool jacket as a definitive partner for the dinner dress. McCardell knew that no woman wanted to suffer weeks of a disabling cold or flu for the sake of one evening in bare (and blue) shoulders. She allowed for a dinner suit that could serve well during at least three seasons of the year and also including variable circumstances at the dinner table.

A D A P T I N G

Designer sportswear is the most innovative dress reform of the twentieth century. A tough-minded writer-critic such as Bernard Rudofsky argued in *Are Clothes Modern?* in 1947 that "The clothes we wear today, are anachronistic, irrational and harmful. Moreover, they are expensive and undemocratic." By the time Rudofsky launched his treatise, and annexed the Museum of Modern Art to the institutions with some invective against bad fashion, the basic argument for sportswear as dress reform had long been made through the designs and writings of a number of women designers, as well as Dorothy Shaver and Sally Kirkland.

This dress reform was gender specific. The charges of infelicity and discomfort, expense and elitism were justly addressed to womenswear. Menswear had a rationalism to it, as even Elizabeth Hawes would admire. Reasoned dress was the dress of men: its shirts that could be shirtwaists, its sizes that could be reliable, its pockets that could be commodious, its dressing-for-the-day ideal that could be emulated, and its sweaters and jackets for layering and for permutations of the formal and the casual. In short, menswear provided a model for what womenswear might become, and many of the creators of designer sportswear selected their favorite elements from the haberdashery and tailoring of menswear. As reason had, since the women's-rights meetings in Seneca Falls, New York provided women justification for political equity, so rational dress was to usurp many male prerogatives, culling the very best menswear advantages and trying to eliminate some of the most egregious disadvantages of womenswear.

Active sports provided another alternative, realized in myriad small details. As I argued in 1985 in *All-American: A Sportswear Tradition*, "Our manner of dress in America has been more substantially transformed by our increased leisure and desire for the sports style than perhaps by any other factor.... We are, in this century of leisure, all transformed by American sportswear dressing. It is our style in every respect: it is what we are and how we live."

Each activity brought a practical note to the wardrobe: croquet, bicycling,

Muriel King
Dinner dress, 1937-38
Black velvet and black-and-white striped silk gauze
Gift of Muriel King, 1974 (1974.135)

For the soigné Muriel King, a dinner dress could take on the effect of separates, even emulating a nineteenth-century military spencer at the high-waisted curve of the waistline. The lower portion of the dress with its striped fabric appears to be a separate underdress, reflecting the casual ethos of sportswear like so many other fresh stripes of the 1930s and 1940s.

racquet sports, riding, bathing, and more. As I said in the above-mentioned publication, "A traditional distinction between fine and delicate materials for women's clothing and crafted tailoring and hardy fabrications for menswear was altered by the requirements of women participating in sports activities and the supposition that women would engage in such activities outdoors." Every instance of active play tested the conditions of traditional womenswear: Leser, Brigance, McCardell, and others knew the possibilities of soft cotton playsuits and swimsuits, the latter serving for more than lolling beside the water. In *Women of Fashion*, Steele noted that the 1940s bathing suits of McCardell, Leser, Schnurer, and Clarepotter were all notably featured in the magazines. In fact, they may have constituted a soft-core pornography for a very discreet era, but their greatest effect was to retrain the posture of women and to encourage the health reform of swimming. A relaxed pose, slouching with hands in pockets, was used to show daywear; playsuits and active sportswear encouraged the modern woman to desire a physical beauty not of the runway but of a more natural setting and circumstance. If apparel was to be honestly geared to the healthy regimen of sports, beauty could be no less attuned to the idealism of the innocent, natural bodies that sportswear displays.

Claire McCardell
Day suit, 1954-55
Red-and-black wool and green silk satin
Gift of Irving Drought Harris, in memory of Claire McCardell Harris, 1958
(CI 58.49.13 a,b)

Combining a high-waisted skirt with a cropped spencer-style jacket, McCardell recreated the Empire proportions, but with a sleek silhouette. By disturbing conventional proportions, McCardell fostered the interdependence of the two garments, though either one could theoretically stand separate from the other. Menswear, even down to smart dressing in the crisp manner of military spencers, obtained, as McCardell seized the vivid Stendhalian heroism of red and black.

Tina Leser
Day suit, ca. 1957
Green wool with velvet trim
Gift of Mary M. Rumsey, 1994
(1994.582.5 a,b)

Although Leser was best known for her eclectic Pacific style in leisurewear, she was nonetheless a privileged daughter of Philadelphia who had studied there at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and in Paris at the Sorbonne. This handsome day suit is indebted to the riding habit, even including a side drape and velvet collar. Ironically, the designer who eschewed Western tailoring in so many examples of her leisure clothing was capable of adapting menswear and women's activewear tailoring to create a very smart suit.

American
Afternoon dress, 1940
White synthetic crêpe
Gift of Janet Hollander, 1940 (CI 40.182 a,b)

With the onset of war, the values of utility and patriotic zeal commingled. Jewelry, accessories, and even dresses became fields on which to write the American spirit. Such practicality and fervor are always dissonant with high style or fashion derived from the European model. American designer sportswear was already independent of Europe before World War II; its rhetorical position had already been vigorously argued and perceived as an authentic American sensibility. That this anonymous dress focuses on unusual buttons and a practical hood only corroborates its distinctively American personality.

B.H. Wragge
Yachting dress, ca. 1937
Cream linen with silk appliqués
Gift of Jacqueline Loewe Fowler Costume Collection, 1985 (1985.367.15 a,b)

Vividly present in memorable American graphics of womenswear by Charles Dana Gibson and J. C. Leyendecker, the sailor's middy had long been ashore and popular in women's clothing. Norell transformed sailor uniforms into high style. Wragge invented a fresh motif from the sea and boating for this crisp summer dress with marine flags.

Left:

Fred Picard and Bobbie Yeoman

Tennis ensemble, 1947

White cotton piqué

Gift of Bloomingdale Brothers Inc., 1947

(CI 47.74.26 a-d)

A tennis dress, shorts, and hat provided for sports apparel what designer sports apparel was increasingly using as a system of variable dressing, allowing for interchangeable parts. Many years after this outfit was created, Halston would coyly claim that the client made the clothes by assembling and styling his parts. The model of variable parts was required for sports dress and then rendered as a solution providing positive versatility in designer sportswear, including the possibility that a tennis dress might even be acceptable attire for a lunch outdoors.

Claire McCardell

Bathing suit, 1945

Black wool and rayon jersey

Gift of Mrs. A. Moore Montgomery, 1970

(1970.153.2)

McCardell understood the skivvies connection: underwear and swimwear. Using fastenings and jersey material appropriated from underwear, McCardell made her version of the little black dress as a beach outfit. More often, McCardell bathing suits were of cotton stripes and plaids.

Carolyn Schnurer
Romper, 1940s
Chartreuse linen
Gift of Julia B. Henry, 1978 (1978.288.52)

Schnurer, the indefatigable traveler and apparel anthropologist, used touches of regional and vernacular flavor to give excitement to dressmaking ideas that were always composed of simple, useful silhouettes. The innovation resides not in the change of profile but in the globe-trotting acuity for sweet detailing.

Tina Leser
Beach cover-up, late 1940s
Red-and-white checked cotton
Gift of Mrs. John Saril, 1988 (1988.402.1)

Tina Leser, born in Philadelphia, started her first fashion business in Hawaii, where wraps, djellabahs, playsuits, and beach cover-ups were the order of the day, often as much influenced by the East as by the West. After 1941, she worked in New York but continued in the same mode of inventing textile-rich cover-ups and leisurewear. This red-and-white checked smock seems loosely seized from the picnic tablecloth and from pure Americana, but here with an easy untailored silhouette tempered by Eastern dress.

Claire McCardell
Romper, 1942
Plaid cotton
Gift of Claire McCardell, 1949
(CI 49.37.46)

In some ways, Amelia Bloomer, who invented bloomers in the nineteenth century, had to wait to be vindicated until McCardell's piquant playsuits and rompers of the 1940s and 1950s. McCardell's version of dress reform was not absolutist or strident; some of its best uses occurred in playsuits and sensuous dresses, but it was nonetheless an earnest reform, allowing women to move in new ways and to choose leisure as a lifestyle. Even in this romper, McCardell included side-access pockets, so that the woman need carry no burden. This is a carefree garment, because it so carefully and deliberately regards the need for freedom of activity and other needs as well.

Claire McCardell
Play/bathing suit, 1943
Checked cotton gingham
Gift of Claire McCardell, 1945 (CI 45.71.4)

The natural drape of a McCardell could even pass, as in this example, through the legs, especially in swimwear and when emulating the style of non-Western untailored clothing that gyrates around the body. Many different body types could be accommodated and even flattered by the interplay of fabric contingent on the body and the whirling fullness of drapery. Howard Chandler Christy's graphic all-American girl as Liberty in World War I posters has been transformed. This outfit, with its simply wrapped and flowing drapery, is a new World War II rendering of neoclassical wet drapery that has inventively become a McCardell playsuit. McCardell's summer ginghams of the 1940s are distinct Americana.

Opposite Page:
Emily Wilkens
Romper, 1945
Gray-and-white striped cotton
Gift of Emily Wilkens, 1945 (CI 45.84.4b)

Long before rock 'n' roll and James Dean movies, Emily Wilkens invented the American teenager, pegging her sensibility to young, playful, energetic women. In an era when other mother-daughter designers were taking all their cues from maternal dress, Wilkens preferred youth. In program notes for her 1944 Coty award, Wilkens was described as "a young American designer of taste and originality who recognized an age group of the feminine public which deserved style consideration—and gave it to them. This faction is the teen-age girls to whom Miss Wilkens devotes all her talents. The result has been clothes which not only please the youngster, but are acceptable to her mother."

Above and Opposite Page:
Emily Wilkens
Evening dress and detail, 1945
Pink-and-white striped cotton
Gift of Emily Wilkens, 1945 (CI 45.84.6)

The common sense of washable cottons demonstrates Wilkens' reason for choosing that material, even for an evening dress. In an article titled "Emily Wilkens: Young Original" (*Yours—Careers for Women*, fall 1947), the anonymous author summarized, "Miss Wilkens' main ambition is to prove to the fashion world that wardrobes must be planned for young girls with the same care as they are for matrons. So far she has convinced eight million Junior customers that she has the answer to their problems." For Wilkens, the striped cotton dress with bow is both an enchantment and a problem-solver. In a few years, Christian Dior would pose his *jeune fille* as dressmaking model as static as a Degas bronze, but Wilkens was already long at the junior party.

PROFILES OF DESIGNERS

The designers whose profiles are given below constitute the main designers of sportswear in America from the 1930s to the 1970s. Not all of them are represented in this volume by illustrations of their work.

Unless otherwise indicated, the illustrations in this section are in the collection of the Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, The Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Louella Ballerino

Louella Ballerino advertisement, 1948

One of the most important California sportswear designers, Ballerino began by selling fashion sketches, working in a custom dress shop, and teaching fashion. Beryl Williams, who devotes a chapter in *Fashion Is Our Business* to Ballerino, quotes the designer: "'I always told my students that they couldn't expect to be really original. After all, there are just so many colors in the world, and so many lines; and everything they could conceive of had, somewhere, sometime, been done before. Therefore what they must learn was, first, the ability to concentrate; and, next, the ability to adapt old ideas to new forms. Of course they must be constantly aware of the world around them and of the general trend in which fashion was moving. But beyond that it was up to them to create new styles by applying their minds to the adaptation of already-existing things.'" Ballerino applied a similar wisdom to her own design, insisting on peasant looks, African and global sources, simple and sturdy fabrics, and washable materials. Her dirndls were famous as a vivid California look; her decorated collars were inspired by Panamanian dress; peasant aprons and Dutch-boy trousers represented Ballerino's romance of sportswear looks from around the world. Ballerino was one of the first designers to detach herself from Europe and to think innovatively of other sources of practical, serviceable fashion. In this, she became the great avatar of California sportswear. In the 1970s, The Los Angeles Fashion Group in *Those Designing Women . . . Those Golden Years* reported of Ballerino, "Those who think 'ethnic' is new should see the gigantic collection of folklore books from which Louella Ballerino drew inspiration for her colorful fashion as early as the late 1930s."

Geoffrey Beene, b. 1927

Geoffrey Beene design. Photograph by Neal Barr, 1970, shown in Harper's Bazaar, *April 1970. Gift of Neal Barr, 1990*

In the exhibition catalogue *Geoffrey Beene: The First 25 Years* (1988), Marylou Luther distilled Beene's ethos of sportswear invention in a brief account: "By ignoring Paris design in favor of creating something uniquely American, Beene began to shatter some Seventh Avenue shibboleths. In 1966, he brought grey flannel, wool jersey and tweed into the ballroom. In 1967, he turned a football jersey into a sequined evening gown. In the 1970s, he made evening dresses of denim and sweatshirt fabric." These unequivocal landmarks of American independence characterize Beene's pragmatism and certainty. Beene sees 1972-73 as a critical time in his career, when he gave up any lingering stiffness in structure that he might have found in Paris or Hollywood and began to create instead the liquid forms of his later work. Beene's

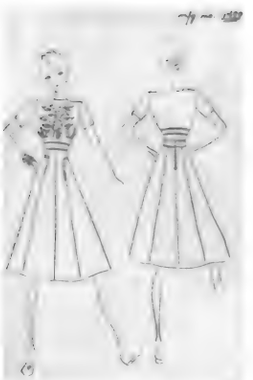
sportswear fulfilled the dream of clothing's innate luxury and accommodation to movement without any pretense. In particular, he uses quilting, menswear adaptations, fastenings adapted from equerries, Asian influences, and tying in ways that both perpetuate the designer sportswear tradition and prove its continuing capacity to render a high style common. A significant aspect of Beene's sportswear heritage is his virtuoso ability to avoid both the waist as a horizontal line and the template of fashion as front and back. Instead, he swirls and gyres fabric in the traditions of McCardell and Cashin; he maneuvers and obscures the waist, even in his most sophisticated garments, with all the legerdemain of the pioneers.

Bill Blass, b. 1922

Bill Blass advertisement, 1968

Asked by *American Fabrics and Fashions* in fall 1974 to define a fashion classic, Blass expressed his sportswear credo: "The things you can count on season after season." Similarly, one counts on Blass for quality fabrications, elegance, and versatile separates. Eleanor Lambert once noted of Blass, "Like most people who seem to be most typically New York, Bill Blass comes from Indiana." Blass has taken as his lifework Edith Wharton's entreaty to "Do New York!" negotiating his sophisticated interests in Schiaparelli, especially the well-cut jacket, and Mainbocher, as well as his recurrent interests in Hollywood glamour, but also bringing sportswear to bear on these cosmopolitan images. Blass practices the most urban and urbane form of sportswear, enjoying the layering of cognate sweaters, blouses, and cardigan or tailored jackets. Complements and matches as rich as those of Cashin obtain in Blass's debonair outfits.

Tom Brigance, 1913-1990



Tom Brigance design sketch, 1941

Eugenia Sheppard, in *The Herald Tribune* (October 28, 1947), asked Brigance about the juggernaut of the "Dior New Look" and its effect: "Down to particulars about next year's clothes, he hates hip padding and corsets, and calls them un-American. Their influence, though, has made American women shape-conscious, and the season just coming up, he prophesies, will be one of highly shape-conscious clothes." Galey & Lord hailed Brigance as its "all American star" for his forthright and simple design, often for leisure, always with simplicity and comfortable wraps and ties. His swimsuits were legendary: even his *New York Times* obituary cited one of his manufacturers as saying that they could reproduce one design in any material and keep selling it season after season. Publicist Eleanor Lambert opened a 1951 Brigance biographical release, saying, "Because American women love clothes that stimulate them and are at the same time highly functional, Brigance, who designs such clothes for Charles W. Nudelman, is winning for himself an ever-increasing host of enthusiastic admirers all over the U.S.A. 'Good American clothes should be able to go anywhere,' Brigance maintains. 'They should not be designed with a single town or section in mind. They should be appropriate for the American woman's mode of living, expressive of her individual personality, and suitable for the climate she lives in.'" Brigance's apogee was during his years with Lord & Taylor in the 1930s and 1940s, but he continued to make important leisure wear through the 1970s.

Bonnie Cashin, b. 1915

Bonnie Cashin design sketch, 1969

Dorothy O'Neill reported in *The New York Times* (October 13, 1950) on Cashin's Coty Award presentation: "Bonnie Cashin's lively fashions followed. Included were a gay, bare playsuit, her well-known toga and shell coats, her blithe apron fashions, and her sheath dresses with gossamer flowing coats. In her citation, it was said that her gay and witty approach to sport and street clothes had brought new vitality to fashion." And so Cashin always has. After working in films in Hollywood, she designed for Adler & Adler in New York beginning in 1949, then worked for Philip Sills & Co., and later launched her own business, The Knittery. Cashin is an original, drawn to true fashion inventions: her

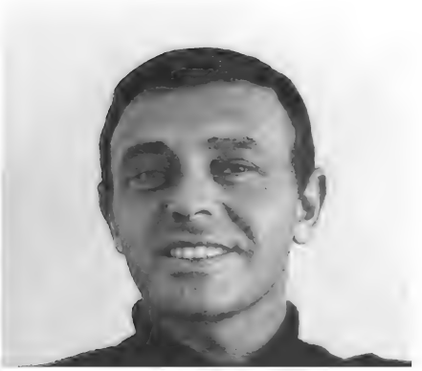
bandanna apron of 1956 was simply a big cotton bandanna cinched into a serviceable apron; her paper clothes anticipated the popular paper dresses of 1966 and 1967; her combinations of leather and suede with wools, tweed and mohair, were unprecedented but are now classics; her synthesis of East and West, especially her Noh coats, had a Pacific Rim globalism before such design became politically correct or well known. One recognizes the lyric invention of a Cashin outfit described by *Harper's Bazaar* (August 1943): "This fall, if you're smart, you'll have an apron, or at least pretend to have. . . . The dress is in black Botany wool with bracelet-length sleeves pushed up as far as they'll go, and the gathered front of the skirt is made of copper-colored leather like the working apron of a Renaissance craftsman." Indeed, Cashin is the Renaissance craftsman of designer sportswear and a woman at that.

Anne Fogarty, 1919-1980

Anne Fogarty advertisement, 1968

After working in fashion modelling, styling, and public relations, Fogarty became a designer for Youth Guild in 1948, entering immediately into the new Seventh Avenue ethos of youthful, simplified apparel. In 1957, Fogarty joined Saks Fifth Avenue. As *Current Biography 1958* reported of her first Saks collection, "This round-the-clock wardrobe consisted of dresses. shoes, jewelry, hats, and lingerie, and was produced by Andrew and Leonard Arkin. Among the silhouettes of her May collection were: the 'camise'—a low-necked, high-waisted style with shirred bodice, short puffed sleeves, and skirt that falls full below. Another silhouette was a 'relaxed sheath'—a slender, straight form cut to allow freedom of movement. These dresses were sleeveless or short-sleeved. Necklines were usually banded. She also introduced a series of soft, full-skirted shirtmaker dresses with long sleeves and pleated fronts. The fabrics used for this collection were often Japanese in aspect, as to both pattern and coloring." In 1959, Fogarty published her book *Wife-Dressing*, a last-gasp rhetorical treatise for constraint, including the girdle, lack of comfort, and dressing for the sake of men. Without exculpating her from these strong sentiments and statements ("Complete Femininity" as the dress principle), Fogarty can be seen to be less constrained and less dogmatic in her subsequent work. Valerie Steele, in *Women of Fashion* (1991), is perhaps too extreme in her criticism of Fogarty, which relates chiefly to the designer's words of 1959, not to her deeds and garments of the 1940s through the 1970s. Fogarty continued to speak out in captions accompanying ads for her own company in the 1960s as well as in advertising for American Airlines. For the latter, she wrote in 1996, "Effortless—that's how a vacation and the clothes for it should be. Unencumbered, sure-of-themselves. Giving you quick rapport with everything that's happening." For her own clothes, Fogarty wrote, "This is my very dry cocktail dress. . . . I designed it for the woman who loves to dress up but hates the word dressy." In the 1960s, Fogarty seized the easier forms of the time, playing ironically with her own hallmarks, the petticoat and shirtwaist. But she had come full circle by recognizing that an American consumer was ultimately not drawn to "wife-dressing" but to the vigor of youthful exuberance, the matrix of designer sportswear.

Rudi Gernreich, 1922-1985



Portrait of Rudi Gernreich, photograph by Jacques Faure, ca. 1960

First an art student, then a dancer, Gernreich began in fashion in 1949, never forgetting the principles of his former disciplines: conceptual art and the moving body. Concerning the former, his ideas were often so advanced that it was difficult to determine whether they were intellectual reportages on viable artifacts. When he appeared on the cover of the December 1, 1967 *Time* Magazine (the fifth *Time* cover given to an American fashion designer [Norman Norell, manufacturer Ben Zuckerman, James Galanos, Pauline Trigère, and McCardell preceded]) with an article titled "Up, Up & Away," it was hard to know if the magazine was taking him seriously or simply treating him as another phenomenon of the then-prevalent Pop mentality. There was certainly some tongue in cheek when *Time* reported, "For last month's spring showings, Gernreich arrived togged out in one of his favorite zippered Pierre Cardin 'cosmocorps' suits, looking every bit as futuristic as his fashions. Standing fully erect, his 5-ft. 6.5 in., 138-lb. figure poised with a lithe dancer's grace, he told the buyers and press: 'A woman today can be anything she wants to be—a Gainsborough or a Reynolds or a

Reynolds Wrap.'" As Bernadine Morris wrote in Gernreich's obituary in *The New York Times* (April 22, 1985), "He used psychedelic colors before the word was coined. He showed mini-skirts when many people associated the word with Minnie Mouse. In 1964, his topless bathing suit made his name a household word. Next to Christian Dior, his was probably the best-known name in fashion at the time." Gernreich was inexorably an extremist and an avant-gardist, but the principles of his work were in tune with the pragmatism, physical freedom, and honesty of American sportswear practices.

Halston (Roy Halston Frowick), 1932-1990

Halston advertisement, 1977

Late to the conventions and traditions of American sportswear, Halston was in many ways the tradition's *summa* or consummation. He wrapped, mixed, tied, layered, and otherwise practiced the conventions of sportswear with all the ease of a second-generation designer who had wholly assumed and assimilated principles of Cashin, McCardell, and Fogarty and made them his own. "Women make fashion. Designers suggest, but it's what women do with the clothes that does the trick," said Halston in a favored, often-repeated remark to Eugenia Sheppard (*The New York Post*, February 7, 1973). In acceding to the client, Halston was not merely flattering, though that he could do; he was recognizing the democracy and the authority of women's needs in his creations. In an example thereof, when the Fashion Institute of Technology presented the exhibition "Halston: Absolute Modernism" in 1991-92, several individuals from the Halston circle were invited to review styling of the mannequins the day before the exhibition opened to the public. One gallery was devoted to materials; the carpeting had been peeled back in three long swathes to provide a Robert Morris-like gathering of material and also to isolate the rich textiles and palette. One Halston stylist directed that the simplest shirtwaist at the front of one procession be changed; he suggested that the mannequin's collar be turned up "as Halston always did." After that Halston friend left, another arrived and made a beeline to the same mannequin, asking to turn down the collar ("Halston admired a neat look") and roll up the sleeves. A third stylist of the Halston circle arrived in the early afternoon and requested that the sleeves should be rolled down again and the collar should be tipped upward. The moral was, of course, not to see all this as a dispute but as the presence of the option for versatility in one dress that is so nearly a uniform yet also so capable of many individual and subjective expressions. As Harold Koda and Richard Martin referred to that experience ("Some Modernist Principles in Presenting *Halston: Absolute Modernism*," *Textile & Text*, 1991), "Halston was an exceptional designer, one whose clarity of concept is never betrayed by the individuals who wear the garments. Those who wear clothing may make fashion an aesthetic domain, but great designers create the garments that are passports to the kingdom of style." First a milliner and creator of the famous Jackie Kennedy pill-box hat, Halston understood the subjectivity of wearing fashion, but he also knew that simplicity and pragmatism constitute an undeniable and unconditional beauty.

Elizabeth Hawes, 1903-1971

Elizabeth Hawes in her studio. Photograph by Mary Morris Lawrence, 1941

Hawes is an outstanding figure in the area of fashion dissent and discourse, by-lined "Parasite" by *The New Yorker* (1927-28). Hawes believed in the power of fashion and sought to bring that power to women of sensible belief. To see the cogent frankness of Hawes's argumentation, consider her 1940 column from her regular series "Fashion of the Month" in, of all places, *Pontiac Owners' Magazine*. Hawes tackled the question of women and trousers, a recurrent theme in her writing. In advance of war's exigencies and Rosie the Riveter's advent, Hawes calmly stated, "Why should women wear trousers? Because trousers are the most comfortable things for active work or active sports, and most of us girls are busy most of the time being something other than just plain glamorous. It is more important to be comfortable than to observe the traditions." The argument for comfort is a standard of the dress-reform propositions about clothing for both men and women. Hawes wasted no time in justifying why pants are more comfortable than the traditional skirt, but she addressed the arguments against women wearing pants with the eagerness of a philosophy student rising to an unconsidered postulation. She said, "'But woman can't wear trousers,' a lot of people say. 'They haven't the figures.' I say, then men can't wear

trousers either, because there are just as many men with round hips and protruding tummies as there are ladies."

Hawes denounced the American addiction to European style, but that denunciation was in the Emersonian tradition of national aesthetic independence, still being declared in twentieth-century arts by George Gershwin, Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O'Keeffe, and others. She perceived a positive and liberating role for fashion, if ever it could be relieved of its burdensome traditions. In fact, Hawes's own work as a fashion designer was composed of two elements. She designed for the ready-to-wear market, and she was a custom designer, working directly with clients. She preferred the latter and continued that business long after her disenchantment with the formulaic attitudes of Seventh Avenue had caused her to abandon that part of fashion. Ironically, the very model of the two avenues that Hawes pursued would become the ready-to-wear and custom-order bifurcation that Halston followed to commercial downfall and that only in the 1980s and 1990s has been tracked to success.

Hawes had, of course, interned in the fashion system that derived all knowledge from the couture collections of Paris, and she brought back to the United States samples, copying studies, and derivative designs. In Paris in the late 1920s and 1930s, she became increasingly disillusioned with this kind of inherent desperation and degeneration in design and saw a need to emancipate American fashion from the tyranny of the French and from copying. She was an innate modernist, scorning the ornamentation that was ordinarily associated with the value-added product of apparel. She was not, however, a schooled modernist. That is, she was not looking at other design arts of the 1920s and 1930s and, in fact, seems almost surprised in her writings to find that American architecture and interiors were streamlined and ultimately sparse in the late 1930s and in the war years. Instinctively, though, she knew that plain was better and that practical was better yet. And she knew by instinct the principle of wardrobe building, defying the practice of volatile and meaningless change. "Fashion," Hawes wrote, "is that horrid little man with an evil eye who tells you that last winter's coat may be in perfect physical condition, but you can't wear it. You can't wear it because it has a belt, and this year 'we are not showing belts.'"

Donna Karan, b. 1948

Donna Karan advertisement, 1987

One of the so-called "American Trinity" of designers, Karan is most connected by gender and pedigree to the women who invented designer sportswear. In particular, she worked under Anne Klein and succeeded her as designer in 1974. Karan maintains the rationale of style simplification, asking herself even today the ultimate sportswear questions, "What do I need? How can I make life easier? How can dressing be simplified so that I can get on with my own life?" Her debt to Anne Klein is great: bodysuits, jackets and sweaters as wardrobe builder and complements, and the mixing of materials, often inspired by menswear, are Anne Klein ideas sustained and developed by Karan. Luxurious wraps, almost approximating blankets, eveningwear inspired by the tuxedo, and the versatile jacket akin to a man's sportsjacket are all standards of the Karan style. Her coats are daunting in array: some ready for the severe winter and some inspired by skiwear, others with the air-trapping cocoons of cashmere and soft wrapping that have origins in Cashin, Klein, and other sportswear designers.

Anne Klein, 1923-1974

Anne Klein design. Photograph by Neal Barr, 1967, shown in Harper's Bazaar, *February 1967. Gift of Neal Barr, 1993*

In Klein's obituary in *The New York Times* (March 20, 1974), Judith Cummings wrote, "Miss Klein, who professed never to have seen a European fashion collection, was generally credited in the industry with having inspired the trend in contemporary dressing toward clothes that are casual in mood yet polished and elegant. . . . As a designer and businesswoman, Klein was a leader in the development of uniquely American fashion; she both elevated sportswear looks to the level of high style and packaged her designs in interchangeable parts that could easily be put together into a finished look." When *Life* Magazine, always very keen on American fashion, thanks to Sally Kirkland, celebrated split skirts on June 5, 1964, actress Joey Heatherton wore Anne Klein's "dirndl-like pants-skirt of crêpe." Klein loved such hybrids—pants

or skirt, Eastern or Western, dress-up or dress-down.

Klein has remained a touchstone for high-style sportswear. An indicative example is Bernadine Morris's trenchant essay "What to Wear In a Recession" (*The New York Times*, April 21, 1992), in which Morris described pioneering sportswear of the 1930s and 1940s, followed by Paris's revival in the 1950s and London's brief, youthful display in the 1960s. Looking for a model for more austere dressing in the 1990s, Morris returned to Anne Klein, noting, "Not until Anne Klein opened her own business, in the 1970s, did sportswear move to center stage. It came to epitomize American style once again, with practitioners like Calvin Klein, Perry Ellis, Ralph Lauren, and Donna Karan bringing their own visions to casual dressing." In fact, Anne Klein established her own business in 1968, but Morris's thinking is right: she was a fountainhead figure and the crucial link to sportswear as it has developed nationally and internationally since the 1970s. Tragically, McCardell and Klein both had relatively short lives, but their influences are illimitable.

Calvin Klein, b. 1942

Calvin Klein advertisement, 1978

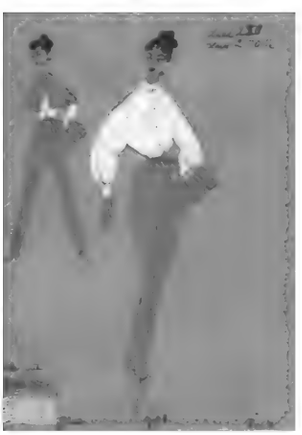
Prophetically, according to *Vogue* in September 1975, "If you were around a hundred years from now and wanted a definitive picture of the American look in 1975, you'd study Calvin Klein: the clothes that are as easy and unstructured as sweaters, the casual turn to city dressing—the whole mood of fashion today comes through in a way that a modern woman can understand and enjoy. . . ." Calvin Klein paradigms in the sportswear tradition include: a "peasant top" with ties in the tradition of McCardell; a robe-wrap in silk, both Chinese inspired and as simple as a boxer's robe; coat-dressing with perfection of layering; and multiplying sweaters with trousers. Calvin Klein became famous for denim, reefer coats, sweater-coats, layers of sweaters, and luxurious silk blouses. What he perfected twenty-five years ago has never been forgotten but only advanced, remaining in the designer's repertoire for a quarter of a century. His sense of innate peace in fine materials—a Shaker-like harmony with fashion basics that prizes luxury but is never gaudy—has guided Klein's disciplined and suave designer-sportswear aesthetic.

Ralph Lauren, b. 1939

Polo Ralph Lauren advertising brochure, 1986

Lauren is the epic and unparalleled image-maker, the narrator of the modern sportswear legend. He has told his story in resplendent images: a burnished version of the British Empire, a narrative of the American frontier replete with heroes and heroines, the Hollywood glamor of the 1930s and 1940s that imagines perfect female beauty and men with one two-toned shoe on the running-board, and the homespun traditions of America, including quilts and denim. His ilk can seem to be E. M. Forster or Scott Fitzgerald, so vivid are his tales and so beautiful is his imagination. Yet Lauren is always tethered to the pragmatics of sportswear. His famous *Annie Hall* look for Diane Keaton conflates layering and menswear; his British classics are versatile and self-confident; and even his American rustics indulge us in the basics, but the basics at their very best. Lauren has rendered the elements of sportswear into mythic grandeur.

Tina Leser, 1910-1986



Tina Leser design sketch, 1953

When Leser won her first Coty Award in 1944, the citation read, "Although Tina Leser's sports and playclothes are eminently wearable and functional, they have a highly decorative quality new to feminine sports costumes. Her manipulation of color and drapery, leaning strongly toward the East, reflects her interest in painting [and] has, in fact, the quality of brushwork on canvas. During 1944, Tina Leser's 'bare brown look,' wrapped-and-strapped silhouette, Persian tunic, water-boy pants, fighting-elephant blouses, and colorful hand-loomed Guatemalan costumes were

particularly outstanding." Like other sportswear designers and American Adele Simpson, Leser was attracted by globalism and a visual anthropology for her apparel. Anthropologist Bernard Rudofsky sought to justify apparel through cultural studies; American designers, detached from and/or despairing of Europe because of its traditional oppression of women or in light of the Holocaust and all the other horrors of World War II, looked elsewhere for inspiration, including at Siamese priests' garb, Mexican serapes and wraps, and Chinese robes and coats. Leser's publicity copy in 1948 sums up her style, "The Mexican urge, the peasant surge are all Leser . . . . Fashion, she says, is more than dressmaking; it is one of the arts. A costume must first be wearable and useful, then fantasy is permissible . . . as a kind of seasoning, a fillip, a spice for individuality." Reaching beyond fundamental practicality, Leser's work was always idiosyncratic and always sought a world view.

Vera Maxwell, 1903-1995

Vera Maxwell design sketch, 1949. Gift of Vera Maxwell, 1958

At the time of her 1970 retrospective at The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., Maxwell told Bernadine Morris (*The New York Times*, March 2, 1970), "I think things go better if you don't get fretful." Maxwell's wisdom is the truism of her work; she was consistently inventive and original but never trampled an idea to death, never overdid a perception. In 1935, she visited Albert Einstein and subsequently designed a collarless tweed jacket with an option for either pants or a pleated skirt, an outfit ready for the relativity of modern dress for travel. In 1942, she made a green suit that *Harper's Bazaar* (March 15, 1942) described as ". . . the jacket that looks like a lumberman's shirt. The collar, the cuffs, the tucks at the waist." In the 1940s, she was the creator of "Rosie the Riveter" coveralls with drop seat, a creation made for women working for the war effort that is still wearable fifty years later as a basic jumper. She wrapped jersey blouses in the 1940s and 1950s, created dresses and separates inspired by the American Indian as early as 1964, and was one of the first designers to work in Ultra-Suede. In fall 1978, Maxwell remembered, "In 1935 my career was launched with a serious intent to get women into softly tailored suits and away from the strictures of the day. I made them with single construction lapels and cuffs to turn up or down with equal ease, and to pair with my collarless coats; there were dresses in supple fabrics—silk, wool,or jersey—all with that soft tactile factor. Still never loath to ignore the monumental developments of man-made fibers, one of my earliest best sellers was a wrap blouse over a permanently pleated skirt of a then untried fabric called Arnel. With amazing resilience, it was perfect for the early traveler not yet jaded by jet-lag!" In 1961, Maxwell celebrated twenty-five years of work by publishing a booklet including fifteen pictures of her work entitled *Is Fashion Timeless—Guess Which Year*; the answers to this question appear only on the last page of the publication. They provide proof that Maxwell's clothes, and indeed all the best sportswear, can easily exist beyond specific time.

Claire McCardell, 1905-1958

Claire McCardell design, sketch by Sara Johns, shown in Harper's Bazaar, *December 1942. Gift of* Harper's Bazaar, *1958*

In the exhibition catalogue *Three Women: Madeleine Vionnet, Claire McCardell, and Rei Kawakubo* (1987), Harold Koda, Richard Martin, and Laura Sinderbrand argued, "More than any other designer in the tradition of American sportswear, McCardell reevaluated dress according to the principles of functionality and truth to materials that are the characteristics of Modernism in the arts. Keenly aware of the history of costume as well as of contemporary fashion, McCardell created design that is slightly outside of fashion, occasionally ungainly and austere in its denial of the 'pretty.'" Smartness in function was the supreme ideal in McCardell's work, thus esteeming such intellectual and tour-de-force gestures as crisscrossing fabrics that take shape from the body within or using spaghetti straps that in their seemingly tenuous suspension provide genuine support to the structure of clothing on the body. McCardell's brilliant wraps twist to obviate darts in a bodice, loop under to create diaper-like lower coverage, and rotate around the body with three-dimensional conviction. The flowing cloth of the 1938 monastic was simple and loose. McCardell's only serious miscalculation may have been to work for Hattie Carnegie in 1939-40;

Carnegie's haughty high-style and McCardell's candor did not match, and the collaboration is said to have ended quickly by mutual agreement. Drawstrings used for necklines and waists allowed for one garment to accommodate countless sizes and idiosyncracies. As the *Thee Women* authors averred, "McCardell avoided complications. She sought solutions. . . . McCardell heeded the specific needs of the garment, but she also answered the clarion call of Modernism requiring design to speak of its materials and to address its specific utility. In so doing, she placed dress among the design arts, and she gave the modern woman not only new clothes but a new code and a new confidence." As her obituary in *The New York Times* (March 23, 1958) noted, "Necessity mothered almost all of Miss McCardell's inventions. In 1942, unable to get proper shoes for her showroom models, she put them into fabric ballet slippers. The fad caught on and their popularity has lasted until the present." Indeed, every McCardell invention and improvisation has lasted until the present, as her chic and rational dress is common sense within a world of hyperbole. McCardell was on the cover of May 2, 1955, *Time* Magazine.

Clare Potter (or **Clarepotter**), 1892-1974

Clarepotter design. Photograph by Louise Dahl-Wolfe, 1941. Shown in Harper's Bazaar, *November 1941. Gift of* Harper's Bazaar, *1944*

Eleanor Lambert in *World Fashion* (1976) reported admiringly, "Mrs. Potter's ambition was to paint, but in 1925 she began designing picturesque clothes for Edward L. Mayer, the leading dress manufacturer of that time. She was one of the first designers to sense the lifestyle shift from formal to casual living and to interpret this change in easy, unconstructed designs, equally appropriate for sports or town wear. As one of the designers promoted in Lord & Taylor's drive to establish the American Look, Mrs. Potter received the Lord & Taylor Award for distinguished designing in 1937." Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Potter explored a sportswear vocabulary, especially pants of various cuts (in pajama forms and in combinations with jackets) and transitional elements with eveningwear. *American Fashion Designers* (1935) offered the classic explanation, "She wears the kind of clothes she makes and makes the kind that all sportswomen adore: fabrics with a 'country' feel, subtle color schemes, no gadgets." According to Caroline Milbank, Potter preceded Mainbocher in offering an evening sweater, allowing layering to help out on gala nights. As Sally Kirkland remembered in the 1985 Fashion Institute of Technology publication titled *All-American: A Sportswear Tradition*, "[Potter] was among the first to make simply cut silk dinner dresses and pajamas with no ornamentation except for their color combinations. She was a great and beautiful lady with a chic, sophisticated following." Potter was not a pure sportswear advocate; she was a figure with a discreet, negotiated relationship to sportswear, admiring its subtle colors and contributing to it from an art background and a passionate traveling schedule that gave her the very fruitful opportunity to accumulate global observations.

Giorgio di Sant'Angelo, 1933-1989

Giorgio di Sant'Angelo and model Barbara Carrera. Anonymous photograph, 1969. Gift of Martin Price, 1997

Inspired and encouraged by editor Diana Vreeland, whose relationship to American sportswear was highly ambiguous, Sant'Angelo directed his gifts as an artist and stylist to making fashion in celebration of 1960s-1970s pastiche, layered gypsy-chic, and fluid extemporized tiers and wraps. Knits and wovens might be mixed; fashion elements could be wholly ad hoc in Sant'Angelo's definition of fashion as a performatory art. When he received a Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) award for his contribution to the evolution of stretch in 1987, he recounted his career simply. After working with Disney, which he found unrewarding, he "went off to play with shapes elsewhere." Fashion offered the vivid "elsewhere." Describing his credo of sportswear, he noted, "Stretch can't be fashion. Stretch is too purposeful for that; it always has connotations for a future that's positive and expanding. You can't stretch and be narrow-minded." Di Sant' Angelo seamlessly carried the process of layering and harmonizing in sportswear into the 1960s and 1970s, even as artistic conjunctions and combinations became characterized by a colorful dissonance and a more political cultural mix.

Carolyn Schnurer, b. 1908

Carolyn Schnurer advertisement, Vogue, *January 15, 1947*

An advertisement in the January 1, 1946 *Vogue* proclaimed, "Carolyn Schnurer, dynamic American designer, went back once again to the remote mountain villages of South America to find inspiration for her latest collection of beach and play-clothes. Imbibing completely the carefree, vital, untamed spirit of the people and the country, she emerged with this truly new and exciting collection of Caribamba fashions." In 1947, Schnurer's "Provencal" collection was accompanied by similar program notes, "Unlike most designers, Carolyn Schnurer takes her inspiration not from the warmed-over fashions of Paris but from the original sources that Paris designers themselves go to for inspiration. She travelled through the inland towns, the little fishing villages. . . . What she found there—translated into the American fashion idiom—is refreshingly new, different, colorful, and brimful of the spirit of the French people." By 1951, Schnurer's indefatigable vagabondage had taken her to Ireland, Portugal, Greece, and Japan. Of the Japan collection for resort 1952, Eugenia Sheppard reported in *The Herald Tribune* on December 19, 1951: "The kimono and the obi sash are naturals for turning into feminine but easy-to-wear dresses. Through the collection, the designer keeps plenty of typical American casual." Smocks, playclothes, wraps, peasant blouses and dresses, and whimsical prints are the essence of Schnurer's work, but by the 1950s she was also making softly draped and sophisticated dresses. She is best known for the beach- and play-clothes—most notably, cotton bathing suits, as opposed to more prevalent knits—such as appeared on the covers of summer issues of major magazines, but her travelling anthropology led her to layers and robust fabrics for fall-winter. She was a devoted researcher as well. *Current Biography 1955* explained the process, "It is Mrs. Schnurer's designing procedure each year to first choose a country on whose native costume she will plan her forthcoming collection. Then she consults the books and experts of the Brooklyn Museum and the costume division of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Here she develops and correlates her theme, studying the costume, background and native habits of the country she has selected."

Diane Von Furstenberg, b. 1946

Diane Von Furstenberg appearing in an advertisement, 1975

Von Furstenberg has said, with a faith reminiscent of the pioneers, "I got into fashion almost by accident, inspired to create the pieces I wanted, but couldn't find, in my own wardrobe. From my original 1970s knit wrap dress, to my new 1990s stretch 'sock dress,' I believe in marrying fashion and function. . . . My clothing must be timeless and versatile." Perceiving fashion to be too casual and led by jeans, Von Furstenberg offered the renewal of sportswear pragmatism—and the classic wrap dress—as the means to return to a model of simplicity and elegance at the same time. Curiously, the process of dressing down to invent sportswear had, by Von Furstenberg's time in the early 1970s, been reversed to a process of dressing up to accept the template of designer sportswear adaptable to many body types. In recent years, Von Furstenberg has also offered new models of selling. She has sold via television, a means of communication unknown to the earliest designer sportswear advocate but eminently available and appropriate when design is so accommodating to body difference and one or a few sizes fit all and serve a nation despite climate and cultural differences.

John Weitz, b. 1923

John Weitz advertisement, 1962

Along with Brigance, one of the exceptional men among the many women designers recruited and schooled by Dorothy Shaver for Lord & Taylor, Weitz created inventive car coats, improbable appropriations of materials, and bright playsuits and jeans in a pre-colorfield-painting kaleidoscope of tonalities. Though Weitz had worked with

Molyneux in London and knew the couture, his inventions for Lord & Taylor are the pure fulfillment of practical, dauntless sportswear. He understood the forthcoming suburban lifestyle and fully seized the car as modern fashion's complement, ultimately writing a book *Sports Clothes for Your Sports Car* in 1959. Subsequently, Weitz has applied the same expeditious principles of straightforward design and marketing to menswear, there, too, a pioneer and a pacesetter. When asked by *Interview* in March 1983 about his couture background, Weitz described, "I'm a modern-day creature that emerged from an old couture assistant into a sort of inventive concept, which I don't mind at all."

Emily Wilkens, b. 1920

Emily Wilkens "Sunmere." Press photograph, 1944

Today it seems platitudinous to say that "teens are special people," but no one was more important than Emily Wilkens in recognizing this market segment and its special needs in the 1940s. With an imagination that took dressing for girls from *Little Women* to modern teenagers, Wilkens employed the principles of sportswear, testing every garment for practicality, emphasizing cottons and other easy-care materials, and allowing a sweet young femininity. Designer sportswear was innately opposed to the matronly dressing of some older styles, and Wilkens perfected the style for youth and built in specific features for their benefit. Adjustable waistbands allowed for variable sizes and weights; subtle swelling at the bust was a kind of perfect mean for the all-American girl, accommodating the bust but never creating a coquette. Wilkens was known for her "young black," showing black dresses with bright accessories, allowing girls to wear "grown-up black" without the austerity of earlier black dresses. Moreover, Wilkens observed young women at leisure and offered them a repertoire of playclothes similar to those being invented at the same time for their elders. She believed in the dress and was in this way retardataire among her sportswear colleagues, finding vindication in the American tradition. Many of her dresses, often researched at The Costume Institute, could have served as costumes for Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma*, popular in the 1940s, and there was always an unabashed "people will say we're in love" glee about her charming, cultivated dresses for the young.

Sydney Wragge for B. H. Wragge, 1908-1978

B. H. Wragge advertisement, 1958

As Sally Kirkland in *All-American: A Sportswear Tradition* said of Wragge, "Sydney in a modest way reminds me of today's Ralph Lauren: impeccable taste and the best fabrics and prints he could find. He loved wool jersey and stood by his belief that it could go out at night." Further, like Lauren, he emphasized the epic of America, often choosing themes of the American countryside and landscape. Caroline Milbank has credited Wragge with leadership in separates, "undeniably the best at presenting the public with interchangeable wardrobes." Part of Wragge's mastery of pastiche was his willingness to combine differing shapes: thus, a boxy jacket could be worn with either a full or narrow skirt, and two-piece dresses could be worn with other shirts or bodices. Wragge successfully translated his acumen for personalized styling into a revived business in the 1960s, answering the needs of a new practical and streamlined generation. Even today, Wragge customers are reluctant to part with the mix-and-match units they bought in the 1940s and 1950s.

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Richard Martin
Curator
The Costume Institute,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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